JKM LIBRARY
PR437.W469
Wendell, Barrett,
The temper of the seventeenth century in
3 9968 02665 0690

PR 437

ACCESSION NUMBER 45786. SHELF NUMBER ~~E 183677~~

The Virginia Library
McCormick
Theological Seminary
of the
Presbyterian Church, Chicago.

From the _____ Fund.

RECEIVED Nov. 1918.

THE TEMPER OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Clark Lectures given at Trinity College, Cambridge in the Year 1902-1903

BY

BARRETT WENDELL

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AT HARVARD COLLEGE

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1904

COPYRIGHT, 1904, BY
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

Published, October, 1904

VIRGINIA LIBRARY
McCORMICK
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

TROW DIRECTORY
PRINTING AND BOOKBINDING COMPANY
NEW YORK

PR
437
W469

PREFACE

My original plan for the lectures contained in this book would have made them, as a whole, twice as long as they are. I meant to treat the second half of the seventeenth century quite as fully as I treated the first. The circumstances under which the lectures were given, at Trinity College, prevented this. The time at my disposal proved so limited that I must either greatly condense the first part of my work or else frankly change the scale on which I should consider the Age of Dryden. I chose the latter course.

Having done so, I thought for a good while that, before venturing to print any of this material, I had best rewrite it, restoring the proportions of the original plan. Various circumstances have prevented such rewriting, until it has become evident that the lectures must either appear as they were given or not appear at all. For several reasons, the former course has seemed on the whole preferable.

In the first place, a considerable part of what interest the lectures may have must arise from the fact that, so far as I am aware, they are the first regular lectures concerning English literature ever given by

45786

an American at an English university. To alter them would be in some degree to misrepresent them.

In the second place, these lectures, made for delivery, not to students but to a popular academic audience, are naturally rather a running comment on the subject in question—a series of essays—than a formal treatise. To turn them into anything like a severe and comprehensive form would be at once the work of years rather than of months, and so radical an alteration of their character that, whatever the result, they would no longer be the kind of thing they are.

In the third place, and by far chiefly, they seemed to me about as expressive as I could make them of what I wished to say. For my purpose was not to write a standard history of English literature in the seventeenth century, touching on every man and work therein included, and giving to each of these, great and small, a value and a place which I might hope should be permanent. My purpose was only to indicate, as best I could, the manner in which the national temper of England, as revealed in seventeenth-century literature, changed from a temper ancestrally common to modern England and to modern America, and became, before the century closed, something which later time must recognize as distinctly, specifically English. Whether these lectures make my view of this national transformation clear, it is not for me to judge; but I feel pretty sure that, even as they stand, they make it as clear as I am now able to. In this

opinion I have been strengthened by the experience of the year which has intervened since the lectures were given. During that year I have treated the matters which they concern in my regular courses of instruction at Harvard College. In these courses, the scale was naturally much larger than that of the Clark lectures, but I could not discover that this enlargement of scale in any way altered the main outlines of my conception.

It is perhaps superfluous to say that any such treatment of a large subject as I have here attempted involves no special study of other than obvious authorities. Accordingly, it has seemed needless to encumber this book with bibliographic matter or with notes. It is not superfluous, however, to add here a word of my gratitude to the friends and the colleagues who have kindly let me talk with them about the matters in question, and whose suggestions have from time to time been deeply helpful. Among these friends I cannot refrain from naming two: Professor William Allan Neilson, now of Columbia University, and Dr. Chester Noyes Greenough, until very lately Instructor in English at Harvard.

Yet, after all, the friends who come most vividly to mind as I write these lines are not the old friends of our New England Cambridge. They are rather the new friends who welcomed me so cordially to their own Cambridge two years ago. In the lectures themselves, I have said something of what that

welcome meant to me; it was not only a personal experience of kindness which can never be forgotten; it was a constant assurance that they had at heart what I had at heart too. Loyal Englishmen can never be Americans, nor loyal Americans Englishmen; but no patriotic loyalty can ever affect the truth that Englishmen and Americans are ancestrally brethren. And whoever does his best to strengthen the sense and the ties of our kinship does a good deed for the future of this puzzling world.

To name these new-found friends individually would be to name all those whom I had the good fortune to meet during my pleasant months in England. Among them, however, is one group, to whom I owe most of all, for it was at their bidding that I came to the deep pleasure which those months brought me. Had chance made these lectures in themselves memorable enough to warrant hope that they deserved such honor, I should have asked leave to give them a formal dedication. And that dedication could have been to none but the Master and Fellows of Trinity.

BARRETT WENDELL.

Nahant, Massachusetts, July 15, 1904.

CONTENTS

PAGE

I. Elizabethan Literature 1

II. The Disintegration of the Drama . . . 46

III. The Decline of the Drama 74

IV. The Divergent Masters of Lyric Poetry . 101

V. The Disintegration of Lyric Poetry . . 128

VI. The Development of Prose 155
The Bible and Bacon.

VII. The Development of Prose 184
Ralegh, Burton and Browne.

VIII. The Earlier Puritanism 207

IX. The Later Puritanism 237

X. Milton Before the Civil Wars 267

XI. The Maturity of Milton 302

XII. The Age of Dryden 327

INDEX 357

THE TEMPER OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

I

ELIZABETHAN LITERATURE

It is hard, they say, for any European to understand what Europe means to an American. We Americans are separated from the Old World by eight or ten generations. We have no more personal traditions of the regions from which our ancestors sailed westward in the seventeenth century than Englishmen have of the Continental lowlands which bred the Angles and the Saxons. Yet our historical traditions are so closely intertwined with those of ancestral Europe—and of England beyond the rest—that we cannot feel ourselves a race apart. Hawthorne spoke for us all when he called England "our old home."

So the kind invitation which summoned me from Cambridge in New England to the Cambridge from which ours derived not only its traditions but its very name, brought me a pleasure which none but an American can fully know. It was deeper than that

which must always come from welcome to a strange yet friendly land; deeper, too, than that which my countrymen must always feel in the immemorial humanity of Europe. It combined them; and, more than all, it touched the heart, like the pleasure which should come from mutual recognition of a kinship for a while half forgotten.

At the same time, like other earthly delights, this pleasure was not flawless. It involved the grim reality of duties. Among them none was more pressing than that of choosing the period in the literature of England concerning which, as an American, I might but speak to Englishmen. My choice was soon made; but the subject of it—The Seventeenth Century in English Literature—may well have seemed so far from novel as to give rise to apprehensive wonder whether there was anything left to say about it. If it be in my power to quiet such apprehension, I may best do so by telling why I chose such a disconcerting topic.

Literature, in the first place, is so comprehensive a term that anyone who habitually uses it can hardly help, after a while, unconsciously giving it some special meaning of his own. As nearly as I can define what literature has come to mean for me, it may be called the lasting expression in words of the meaning of life. Any such definition must be vague; but even from this vague phrase, you will perhaps begin to feel the first article of faith which I have striven to in-

clude in it; namely, that the most significant literature is that which the spontaneous selection of posterity has kept alive from generation to generation—the great men first, whom everybody knows; the lesser men next, whom everybody remembers; and only very subordinately the numberless men whom most people have contentedly forgotten. In studying any subject whatever, we have to simplify it by neglect of countless, bewildering details; and on the whole those which we may most confidently neglect are those which the human race has obviously been able to do without. Our definition of literature will accordingly confine our attention as students to men and works which are more or less familiar.

Our next question is how we should consider them. In this scientific age, the orthodox way is doubtless to deal with them as facts, inquiring what influences and what surroundings produced this book or that, and answering such inquiries with a precision which shall delight people who have to cram certainties for purposes of competitive examination. What is more, one cannot speak too respectfully of this admirable orthodoxy; for it has brought an approach to rational order out of what was lately a sentimental chaos. Yet I shall not follow its methods. For, having grown to think of literature not only as a lasting expression, but as a lasting expression of the meaning of life, I have grown to care for it mostly, not as an historical fact nor yet as an æsthetic, but rather as a

temperamental. The literature of any nation may be likened to the talk or to the letters of men we know. What we come to care for in our friends is not their circumstances but themselves; and we feel that we confidently know them not when we can glibly state facts about them, but when, with such indefinable certainty as assures us of the savor of a fruit or the scent of a flower, we can instinctively recognize in each the qualities which are peculiarly his own. So a literature seems to me most interesting, and most significant, when we consider it as the unconscious expression of national temper.

A cant phrase that last may seem—at best elusive; yet few have more meaning. As history unfolds itself, one grows to feel, it reveals nothing which may better give us pause than the wonderfully various characters of the nations who in turn rise and flourish and decline. Though these characters express themselves in widely various ways,—in conduct, in policy, in social or economic peculiarities, in plastic art,—there is no other phase of this expression quite so habitual, and therefore quite so surely characteristic, as that which takes the form of language. It is by means of language, incalculably more than by any other, that men not only communicate with one another but commune with their very selves. A common language, one grows to feel, is a closer bond than common blood. For at heart the truest community which men can know is community of ideals; and inextricably inter-

woven with the structure of any language—with its words, with its idioms, with its syntax, and nowadays even with its very orthography—are the ideals which, recognized or not, have animated and shall animate to the end those who instinctively phrase their earthly experience in its terms.

By happy chance, England and America think and speak in a common language. However Englishmen and Americans may differ, accordingly, they have never yet differed when, in simplicity of heart, they have tried to state to themselves their ideals of duty. Morally, we both agree, we are bound, with what power is in us, to do right; and by doing right we mean, whether we quite know it or not, what millions of our forefathers have meant by obeying the will of God; and furthermore, whatever our personal convictions, we cannot escape that heritage of our common speech which accepts as guides to righteousness so many of the consecrated phrases of the English Bible. Politically, the while, we are at one in believing that our chief duty is to maintain our rights; and by rights we mean no untested abstractions, but those freedoms, on which no power may encroach unresisted, secured us by the unwritten and the written principles of ancestral English law.

Yet, whoever should conclude from this that England and America are all at one, or have been so, for these two centuries at least, would let his logic belie history. Neither our common language nor the con-

sequent identity of our moral and political ideals have preserved our national tempers from a divergence which began almost as soon as the American colonies were settled. To-day there has come to us a world-need of closer union, of better mutual understanding, than has been ours in the past. That need, I believe, will grow more pressing in days to come. You will see whither these considerations have led me. Bidden to choose the period in the literature of England which we might but consider together, I could not fail to ask myself at once what period might most help us —of England and of America alike—to understand each other. And thus my choice fell inevitably on the seventeenth century.

For, in 1600 there was no America at all. Your ancestors and ours were Englishmen, subject to Queen Elizabeth. Broadly speaking, we may say that the colony of Virginia was finally settled about 1610; that the Pilgrims made their landing at Plymouth in 1620; and that the neighboring colony of Massachusetts Bay had founded its capital city of Boston by 1630. From these three sources, it is commonly agreed, have flowed the streams of tradition—the intellectual, the moral, the political ideals—which have nurtured the national temper of America. It was clearly in the first third of the seventeenth century—in years when every man of mature age had been born under Queen Elizabeth —that these streams parted from those which have nurtured the national temper of modern England.

Again, this parting, which has led to the divergence of our national tempers, may be likened to a parting of friends who presently become in some degree estranged. If they have ever been at one, it is clear that when divergence grows insuperable one or the other must have suffered change. Accordingly, those who have recognized how England and America have tended apart, have been apt to assume that in England the temper of our ancestral race has remained little altered, while in the virgin soil of our new continent our transplanted shoots have run into wildly different luxuriances of their own. The terms of the Clark Lectureship restrict us to the literature of England. I shall barely mention, accordingly, a fact in the literary history of the seventeenth-century America which is hardly in accordance with this general assumption concerning American development. Throughout the seventeenth century, American publications were so monotonous, in body and in soul, that without constant reference to title-pages no human being could guess whether a given paragraph was written by an Elizabethan or by his godly grandchildren under King William III. During that same century, on the other hand, the literary records of England tell a very different story. In 1600, Shakspere was at the height of his productive power; in 1650, Milton had for ten years been a writer chiefly of controversial prose; in 1700, John Dryden died, having crowned his critical work with the masterly preface to his

recklessly collected folio of Fables. That seventeenth century, in brief, when the streams of our national lives first parted, proves in America a period of almost stationary national temper; in England, the while, the temper of the nation, as expressed by literature, underwent the most conspicuous change in all its history.

For Shakspere was a man of his time; and equally a man of his time was Dryden; and both flourished and died during the century which we are to consider together. Yet Shakspere has more in common with Chaucer, who died in 1400, than with Dryden, who was born only fifteen years after the greatest of modern poets was laid under his quaint epitaph in Stratford Church; and Dryden has less in common with Shakspere than with countless other writers of sound prose who have illustrated the reign of Queen Victoria. One may carry the contrast further. It is hardly excessive to say that every vestige of English literature before 1600 may naturally be grouped together, with the literature before the Civil Wars; and that every record of English literature since 1700 may, with equal good sense, be grouped together, with the literature since the Restoration. We can begin to see why to anyone who desires to consider how the national tempers of England and of America have diverged, there is no other period of English literature so instructive as this seventeenth century. For during that century, the temper of England, as ex-

pressed in literature, underwent such a change as comes to human beings when they suddenly lapse from childhood to youth, from youth to maturity, or from maturity to age.

In the hours which we are to pass together, I shall accordingly try to tell you how this period has appeared to an American who, with no too toilsome study, has been reading and pondering about it, at Harvard College, for a good many years. First I shall try to set forth the state of English literature in 1600, when the century began. Then I shall try to show how the temper of this elder time altered; how the drama declined; how lyric poetry disintegrated; how prose tended on the whole to develop; and how beneath this various change there was surging toward the surface of national life a force which never found full literary expression—the passionate idealism of the Puritans. I shall then turn to the earlier poems of Milton, which in some aspects summarize this part of the story. Then I shall touch on Milton's prose and on his later and greater poems; and finally, in more cursory manner, I shall glance at the further course of seventeenth-century literature in England, until the death of Dryden brings its story to an end.

Our first business, we have seen, is to render ourselves some account of the state in which English

literature appeared when the century we are to consider began. In 1600 the reign of Queen Elizabeth was drawing to its close; and to that reign we owe almost all of what is now treasured, from years before 1600, as the modern literature of England. When Elizabeth came to the throne, the work of Chaucer was already what it seems to us—the sole survivor of an archaic elder time. Between Chaucer's death, in 1400, and the middle of the sixteenth century, almost the only English publications which have lasted were Sir Thomas Malory's version of the Arthurian legends; sundry ballads which—for all their perennial vitality—had hardly risen above the condition of folk-song; the "Utopia" of Sir Thomas More; and the earlier versions of those wonderful translations which finally ripened into the Authorized Version of the Bible and into the supreme liturgical rhythm of the Book of Common Prayer. It is hardly by figure of speech that we call the first period of modern English literature Elizabethan. Only a year before the accession of the great queen came the book which is commonly agreed to mark when modern English literature began.

This was the collection of "Songes and Sonettes," generally called "Tottel's Miscellany." It finally put into the accessible permanence of print a considerable number of the verses, hitherto existing only in manuscript, which for many years previously had been habitually made by accomplished men of fashion. The

two of these poets who were personally most eminent, and so whose names are most frequently associated with the little volume, were Sir Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey, both of whom had died under King Henry VIII. During the last century or so, the poems of each have been separately collected and annotated more than once; and if we chose to study each by himself we could easily discover in each a distinct individuality. For the moment, however, it is better worth our while to observe that as their verses appeared in the first of English poetical miscellanies, they seem neither sharply distinguished from each other nor yet saliently different from those of the other poets whose work completes the volume. All this poetical expression evidently sprang from men of freshly awakened perception. One and all of these men were youthfully sensitive to the beauties and the graces of foreign literatures which they had only just learned to know; all were eager to prove whether the untamed language of their still uncultured country was capable, or not, of such effects as had already been achieved by the revived civilization of Italy and of France. In sum, their effort was to domesticate in English the exotic beauties of Continental poetry. Accordingly they never dreamed of what we should now call invention; they translated, they adapted, they imitated; they were frankly, spontaneously experimental; and their experiments never quite attained the ease of mastery.

Already, however, these experiments had revealed two facts. Certain foreign forms which they attempted proved unmanageable in English. Others showed instant sign that they might soon flourish. Of these, the most noteworthy was the sonnet. English is so far less rich in rhyme than the Latin tongues amid which this elaborate species of verse first appeared that one might have expected failure. The rapid development of the English sonnet came from the fact that its ten-syllabled line—the line of Chaucer in the old days, of blank-verse later, and of the heroic couplet—happens to be very like the normal rhythm of English speech. That line, in brief, proved idiomatic; so did certain other verse-forms which the early Elizabethans attempted—forms which resembled the spontaneously idiomatic rhythm of the popular native ballads. If "Tottel's Miscellany" had proved nothing more, it would have proved that English verse had reached a point where it would soon develop idiomatic forms. But the "Miscellany" proved another fact more important still. This hitherto untamed English had doubtless possessed wild beauties, such as even Sidney says he found in the artless ballads which stirred him like a trumpet. Hitherto, however, English had hardly been proved capable of deliberate lyric effect. Now, in the hands of these enthusiastic makers of poetic experiment, the language instantly revealed the lyric power long since acknowledged. Quite apart from all ques-

tions of form or of substance, English words, in immortal collocation, proved capable of exciting such impalpable, unmistakable delight as springs from the beauties of untrammelled music.

From this beginning there had grown before 1600, a seemingly inexhaustible luxuriance of lyric poetry. In 1550, except for popular songs and experimental manuscripts, there was hardly such a thing as an English lyric. In 1600, the wealth of our lyric verse was such that if the period of Elizabeth had achieved nothing else, it would always have been memorable in literary history.

At first, as we have seen, this lyric verse was obviously experimental. Before long, however, it so strengthened that one constantly forgets its relations to the other literatures which it still imitated. Still experimental in truth, it flows so freely that there is little trace left of consciousness, of deliberation. Take any familiar collection of true Elizabethan lyrics—the first Book of Palgrave's "Golden Treasury," for example. You will feel first their beauty, and next what seems their inexhaustible spontaneity. You will never stop to wonder from what foreign model this lovely phrase or that—this or that grace of rhythm—may have been copied. You will be content to linger awhile in a world of fathomless music.

When the seventeenth century began, this music was at its height. Various notes, no doubt, were beginning to sound apart from the rest; but one thinks first

not of impending variety—rather of the still palpable integrity of lyric temper. And in this aspect the lyrics of Elizabethan England were typical of all the literature about them.

Before 1550, for example,—apart from the Prayer Book and the ripening translations of the Bible,—there was in print very little English prose which has proved lasting. Just as our language had not yet asserted its lyric power, it had not yet declared itself efficient for anything much higher than every-day use. Until well after 1600, for that matter, English prose was rarely used for other than practical purposes—information or instruction. Yet one has only to recall a few familiar names to be reminded of what Elizabethan prose had already achieved. Foxe had published that grim "Book of Martyrs" which was so long to stimulate the ardors of extreme Protestantism, and a generation later Hooker had set forth the greater part of his sweetly reasonable plea for the Church of England. Hakluyt was collecting those records of exploration and adventure which tell how the old hemispheric world was rounding into our own planetary one. Chronicles, like those of Stowe and of Holinshed, stirred conscious patriotism by placing within reach of all who would read, or listen, the legendary and recorded facts of national history. There were translations from the classics, too,—the best, perhaps, Sir Thomas North's "Plutarch,"—which were opening anew the whole world of ancient

tradition, fresh again, for the while, with a novelty as alluring as that of the future continents in the western seas. And there were translations as well from modern literatures—chap-books some of them, others collected in such treasuries as Painter's "Palace of Pleasure." The hasty list is already long enough.

By 1600, it assures us, English prose was already alive; and this prose had set forth, in abundance, the motives which were awakening England and English literature into their full national integrity. The records of the voyagers told how the old bounds of the physical world were broken—how there was more than men could know or dream of beyond the pillars of Hercules. The chronicles implicitly asserted how England had its own history—its heroes, its national traditions, its inevitable policies to come. The folios of Foxe, chained with the Bible in the churches, asserted the most extreme doctrines of the Reformation. The translations from elder literatures asserted meanwhile the wide-spread spirit of the Renaissance—with all its inspiration from antiquity and all its freshly pagan humanism.

This spirit, indeed—the spirit which most animated lyric verse—was the most pervasive of all. Throughout Elizabethan prose one feels a quality of spontaneity, of eager experiment, like that which one can feel in Elizabethan poetry. Like the poetry, too, that prose had not yet reached a stage where one can instantly feel the divergence of individual styles. It had a fine

integrity of its own, so like the integrity of the verse that as one considers them together one feels the prose fall into deep harmonic chords, strengthening and defining the spontaneous lyric music which soars above them.

It was amid this environment of strengthening lyric poetry and of increasingly vital prose that the masterpieces of true Elizabethan literature grew into being. On these we must dwell a little more carefully,—on Lily's work and Sidney's, on the swiftly greater achievements of Spenser, and on the wonderful development of the English drama. Yet before proceeding to them, we may well stop to remark a fact which their very names would imply. Though, in various ways of their own, Lily and Sidney and Spenser, and even the dramatists, set forth moods which on scrutiny prove Protestant, any careless reader might scan them from end to end with little reminder of the Reformation. So, too, a careless ear might listen long to the multitude of lyric poets with no suspicion that the morning air about them was charged with elements which were to concentrate in the earthly austerities and the heavenly ecstasies of the English Puritans. Even the prose at which we glanced contained only one work which inevitably suggests Puritanism, and that is Foxe's "Martyrs," published as early as 1563, and so comprehensive in its Protestantism as to have been welcome even at Little Gidding. The conclusion which would follow from these hasty facts

is really true. As a record of English temper, Elizabethan literature has one deep defect; for, at least in lasting literature, Elizabethan Puritanism was inarticulate.

Yet, if we were studying together, not the literature of this period but its history, Puritanism would be the phase of English temper on which we might perhaps be forced to dwell most of all. And even our consideration of the national temper of England, as expressed in literature, cannot neglect it. For the moment, however, all we need remember is that while other phases of this national temper began to find lasting literary expression, Puritanism, for all the voluminousness of its homiletic and controversial utterance, remained only evanescently articulate. The phases of expression, on the other hand, which really ripened in the last years of the sixteenth century—which by 1600 were articulately developed—were one or two kinds of deliberately artistic literature, in both prose and verse, and above all the drama.

Neglecting lesser men, there are certainly three so eminent in the history of deliberate literature, apart from the drama, that we cannot neglect them: these are Lily, Sidney, and Spenser. Virtually of the same age—all three born between 1552 and 1554—they chance to mark three distinct phases in the swift development of Elizabethan literature during the years of their maturity. Of these three phases, that marked by Lily is the earliest.

Apart from his little lyric, "Cupid and Campaspe," hardly a line of his work has survived in general memory. But in its own day, his "Euphues" was by far the most popular book which had ever appeared in English; and, indeed, it has given our language a generic term—Euphuism—still used to define the quality of a style over-burdened with fantastic, affected prettiness.

Modern scholarship has demonstrated that "Euphues" was far from original. The demonstration was hardly needful; in our modern, individualistic sense, no Elizabethan man of letters troubled his wits or his conscience about originality. The men of that happy elder time were not so self-conscious as to crave self-expression for its own sake, nor yet so squeamish as to have any more scruple than a modern man of science against appropriating and using whatever had anywhere been published by anyone else. So, no doubt, "Euphues" was closely modelled on a kind of fantastic literature at one time fashionable in Spain, in Italy, and elsewhere; and, no doubt, too, it was far from the first English work of its kind. If we desire, indeed, to make sure of precisely what Euphuism was, as distinguished from anything else, we must analyze it with distressing minuteness. "When we find this parisonic antithesis," writes a studious German, who has devoted previous pages to demonstrating what Euphuism was not,—"When we find this parisonic antithesis with transverse allitera-

tion and consonance, these endless comparisons from nature, and that predilection for allusions and examples from ancient mythology, history, and literature, we may say we have Euphuism." Very true; and yet, until we can make ourselves understand how all this extravagance delighted, instead of boring, the world to which it was addressed, we can have no idea of what Euphuism meant.

"Euphues" pretends to be a novel. But it has no particular plot, no vestige of character, no trace of atmosphere or background; nothing, in short, but extraordinary and inexhaustible ingenuity of phrase. Sometimes this takes the form of epigram or aphorism—never remarkable for other than trite wisdom; oftener it is a mere question of extravagant fantasy in combination of words. The one indubitable, pervasive fact about the style of Lily is that almost every sentence is turned in a deliberately unexpected way. And the one and only conceivable human appetite to which such a style could ever have appealed is an unslaked thirst for novelty. Euphuism, in short, with its swift and wide popularity, is only another evidence of that eager delight in experiment which we found, a little while ago, so deeply characteristic of Elizabethan lyrics. The world which welcomed it was an almost child-like world, loving novelty so eagerly that even verbal novelty was an unaffected delight. For this merely verbal novelty revealed to Elizabethan readers a fact then quite new: it proved that their own

English language, hitherto not more than a useful thing, was capable of something more. This English, it told them, can in itself delight us; listen, there is no reason why we should not thus be delighted forever.

Except, of course, that novelties go out of fashion almost as swiftly as they come into the same. And Lily, who had the precious faculty of instinctively feeling what his public would welcome, rested content with the two parts of his "Euphues"—the first published in 1579, the second a year later. From that time on he stopped writing novels, and turned himself to plays. We shall revert to him when we come to the drama. Now we must speed on to Sidney.

For, even if Sidney's accidents of birth, of circumstance, of happily heroic and premature death, had not made him a national hero, he would have remained memorable in mere literature. He had the divine gift of fascination, of personal charm. His best-remembered work is the "Defence of Poesie," in which he so courteously answered the Puritan, Gosson, who had presumptuously dedicated to him a rather scurrilous attack on all fine art. Sidney's "Defence" has obvious limits; just at the moment when the Elizabethan drama was dawning, for example, it pedantically asserts principles which would have made the career of Shakspere impossible. Nevertheless, the book can still give pleasure. You take it up as a student. Before you are aware that your mood has

begun to change, you find yourself turning the pages as a reader, hardly disposed to trouble yourself with inquiries as to whether you agree with assertions phrased so winningly.

The same quality pervades Sidney's earlier work—the "Arcadia," of which the posthumous publication is said to have made euphuism seem old-fashioned. More than once, when I have opened the book for study, I have found myself reading on, I could hardly tell why; and that accident has never been known to occur in the case of "Euphues." Partly, no doubt, this is because the "Arcadia," frankly imitative of foreign models though it be, has some vestige of a plot; because its characters, too, have some occasional semblance of vitality; and because, here and there, its descriptions suggest the beauties of Nature, while oftener still they call to mind the immortal unrealities of Renaissance painting. Most of all, however, this quiet fascination is a question of style. The style of Sidney, like that of Lily, was deliberately and ingeniously experimental; but, unlike Lily's, it sometimes rose to excellence. The most familiar example of it is the prayer which the first edition of "Eikon Basilike" professed to have been used, with very slight alterations, by King Charles in the hour of his agony. Milton detected the origin of the words, and pointed it out in a manner so far from sympathetic—I had almost said so scurrilous—that the passage disappeared from later editions of the "Eikon." But mod-

ern feeling would be apt to hold King Charles more nearly right than Milton. Here is the prayer, put by Sidney into the lips of an imprisoned heroine:

"O All-seeing Light and eternall Life of all things, to whom nothing is either so great that it may resist or so small that it is contemned, look upon my misery with thine eye of mercy, and let thine infinite power vouchsafe to limit out some proportion of deliverance unto me, as to thee shall seem most convenient. Let not injury, O Lord, triumph over me, and let my faults by thy hand be corrected, and make not mine unjust enemy the minister of thy justice. But yet, my God, if in thy wisdom this be the aptest chastisement for my inexcusable folly, if this low bondage be the fittest for my over-high desires, if the pride of my not enough humble heart be thus to be broken, O Lord, I yield unto thy will, and joyfully embrace what sorrow thou wilt have me suffer. Only thus much let me crave of thee (let my craving, O Lord, be accepted of thee, since even that proceeds from thee), let me crave, even by the noblest title which in my great affliction I give myself, that I am thy creature, and by thy goodness (which is thyself) that thou wilt suffer some beams of thy majesty so to shine into my mind that it may still depend confidently on thee. Let calamity be the exercise but not the overthrow of my virtue; let their power prevail, but prevail not to destruction; let my greatness be their prey; let my pain be the sweetness of their

revenge; let them (if so it seem good unto thee) vex me with more and more punishment. But, O Lord, let never their wickedness have such a hold but that I may carry a pure mind in a pure body. (And pausing a while) And, O most gracious Lord, whatever become of me, preserve the virtuous Musidorus."

The dignity, the beauty, the pathos of this prayer, as a whole, make us at first prone to forget what the final sentence so instantly recalls to mind—that in truth these noble words, as Sidney wrote them, were not a heart-felt expression of devout feeling, but only one more beautiful rhetorical experiment. In fact, they are no more than another effort, like the euphuisms of Lily, to show the hardly precedented effects of which our new-found English was capable.

This experimental quality of Sidney's style is most evident in the verses interspersed throughout the "Arcadia." Even if we had no other records—of his embryonic academy, the "Areopagus," and the like—these metrical experiments would abundantly prove how eagerly and industriously Sidney tried to nationalize in English the literary forms which delighted him when his wits strayed abroad. Some of the verses he thus made are admirable examples of the spontaneous beauty which vivifies all the lasting Elizabethan lyrics; others, particularly when he tried to subject the stubbornly modern rhythm of English to what he believed the immutable laws of classical prosody, are almost comically impotent. The fact that his

achievements and his failures stand side by side—that one can never feel sure whether he had a shade of question that each of his efforts was as good as the last or the next—reveals the truth about even the ripest beauties of his endless, rambling romance. From beginning to end, like "Euphues" itself, the "Arcadia" was imitative of foreign models, innocently predatory of whatever it chose to take to itself, and, above all, consciously experimental.

Experimental in some degree, too, were the sonnets which are Sidney's highest poetical achievement. In one aspect, the unfinished and somewhat confused sequence, which he called "Astrophel and Stella," seems only a deliberate effort, far more nearly successful than any before it, to prove English capable of such effects as had already made immortal the sonnet-sequences of Italy. In another aspect, despite all their artificialities, these sonnets seem so genuine that, in our literal age, one is disposed to marvel how the pathetic story which they tell can have remained so long neglected by romantic poets of later times. Whatever the truth—whether they were mere experiments or the actual record of a deeply ideal love—there can be no doubt that their publication in 1591 set a fashion. Before 1600, the sonnet-sequence had become a popular and a permanent form of English literature; and had Sidney left no other literary trace, he would still be memorable as the first masterly writer of English sonnets.

Traces enough he left besides, not only in literature but in the heart of national tradition. There is only one other, however, on which we have time now to touch: he was the friend, the patron, and to some degree the instigator of the single poet among his immediate contemporaries whose achievement has won permanent place not only in English literature, but in the literature of the world. This was Spenser.

The Poet's Poet he has been called so long—he has proved so long and so surely an inspiration to those who have tried to make our language an instrument of beauty—that one is apt to forget how he was once only another poet among the rest who were making the new literature of England. Not to speak of his other work, the "Faerie Queene"—though it remains, like some grandly begun cathedral, only a colossal fragment—is beyond doubt a masterpiece. You may despair as much as you like over the pre-Quixotic intricacies of its tenuous plot; you may lose your way, again and again, in futile efforts to follow the invisible thread of its allegories; you may lay the book down, more than once or twice, dazed for the moment with the sweetness of its melody; but you may search it almost in vain for the page, for the stanza, even for the line, which is not alive to this day with the very soul of Elizabethan music. Such mastery of language, turning into deathless beauty words and phrases which had seemed fit only for humdrum use, English had never before approached;

and that mastery has never been surpassed. Indeed, one can hardly imagine that it ever will be.

Yet, as one grows even slightly familiar with Spenser's whole work, one begins to perceive in it, besides his permanent characteristics, features which mark him as historically Elizabethan. There are traces left of his early experimental theories—the vestiges of the "Areopagus," for example, and the surviving bits of his correspondence with Gabriel Harvey. In the "Shepherd's Calendar," he avowedly attempts a great many literary experiments, bolder, more free, more comprehensive than those which appeared in Sidney's "Arcadia," but obviously of the same school. If one were disposed to doubt whether Spenser could possibly be literal, his "View of the State of Ireland" would set doubt at rest; though cast in the now obsoletely conventional form of a pseudo-classic dialogue, it states plain facts with uncompromising precision. Yet, when Spenser attempted to treat fact in poetry, he began by elaborately conventionalizing it. In his elegy on Sir Philip Sidney—"Astrophel," he calls it—he describes his dead patron as a shepherd; and he sets forth the death which he so deeply laments as resulting from the bite of a boar, which involved physical details identical with those under which poor Sidney lay suffering after that mortal wound at Zutphen. In "Colin Clout's Come Home Again," Spenser pleasantly records his obligations to Sir Walter Ralegh; and, by way of intimating that at one time they read their verses to each other, he tells us that when

the Shepherd of the Ocean came to visit Colin Clout, one piped while the other sang, and presently, when the first took to singing, the second piped in turn. Spenser belonged, in short, to a time which could not imagine a treatment of fact to be poetic unless that treatment should distort fact into some lifeless likeness of conventional and civilized fiction.

The "Faerie Queene" itself, indeed, if one neglect for a while the wonderful mastery of its diction, has a rather archaic aspect. "The general end of all the book," the preface tells us, was "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline." Spenser seems to have intended that the poem should be practically didactic—should help people to behave themselves properly. Yet, instead of proceeding to dreary aphorisms, he instantly loses himself in the melodious mazes of his confused and misty allegory. The principles which animated him may have been almost as beautiful as the lines he came to write so freely; but what these principles were, no unaided reader could ever guess, and the few who have had the patience to puzzle them out have not been perceptibly influenced by them in point of conduct. As a didactic poem, the "Faerie Queene" is almost comically inefficient. For which circumstance we may be duly thankful; for no didactic poem has ever yet been such a thing of beauty as is this first truly great achievement of formal Elizabethan experiment.

Yet, great as Spenser is, his greatness lacks the ultimate virtue of simplicity. It chances that the last

two stanzas of the "Faerie Queene"—the fragment which is called "imperfite"—express, in beautifully tentative verse, a feeling which had earlier been summed up, in a deathless line, by one of the three or four poets throughout all literature who are supremely great. Here are Spenser's verses—verses in which one can almost feel a consciousness that all this experiment of his was, at best, only experiment still:

When I bethink me of that speech whyleare,
  Of Mutabilitie, and well it weigh,
Meseems that though she all unworthy were
  Of the Heavens' Rule, yet very sooth to say
  In all things else she bears the greatest sway;
Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,
  And love of things so vain to cast away,
Whose flowering pride, so fading and so fickle,
Short Time shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle.

Then 'gin I think on that which Nature said
  Of that same time when no more change shall be,
But steadfast rest of all things, firmly stayed
  Upon the pillars of Eternity,
  Which is contrayr to Mutabilitie;
For all that moveth doth in Change delight,
  But henceforth all shall rest eternally
With him that is the God of Sabaoth hight.
O, thou great Sabaoth God, grant me that sabbath's sight.

And here is the single line in which Dante summarized forever the thought for which Spenser seems to have been groping:

In la sua voluntade è nostra pace.

"In His will is our peace," it means literally; but no translation can even shadow forth the full meaning which Dante compressed into the marvellous sound and rhythm of his supreme phrase. The contrast between that line of Dante's and those two stanzas of Spenser's tells the whole story of two literary epochs. If others can feel that contrast as I feel it, we need dwell no more on the difference between untiring enthusiasm of experiment and the serene certainty of mastery.

No doubt Elizabethan literature had countless other aspects than this experimental one, on which we have dwelt so long. Yet, for our purpose, this seems to me the most important, the most significant of temper. For, if one reflect a moment, one cannot doubt that the nation which welcomed such varied, such shifting, such spontaneous work as we have glanced at was a nation both passionately eager for novelty and so alert in perception as to notice with unthinking delight even verbal novelties—a nation, too, blest for the while with the rare power of delighting not only in novelty but also in beauty. It is only when this impression of the Elizabethan public grows distinct that one can begin to understand the greatest phase of Elizabethan literature—the drama, which so swiftly developed during the last few years of the sixteenth century. When Sidney's "Defence of Poesie" was written, the English drama, as we know it now, had hardly come into existence. When the seventeenth

century began, fifteen years later, Shakspere's work was half done.

Supremely as he has now emerged above all other modern poets, Shakspere was historically an Elizabethan playwright; and as the facts of his career grow distinct, there seems nothing in them more wonderful than that, in spite of his magnitude, his development was so normal. So normal, too, was the development of the drama in his time that one is apt to choose its history as the most complete recorded example of the natural law which governs the growth, the flourish, and the decline of schools of art. One grows, indeed, to think of the Elizabethan drama as if it were an organism, as distinct and palpable as some physical body; and of Shakspere's work, which comes, both chronologically and substantially, in the very midst of its brief, intense life, as the single concrete fact from which its whole history might be inferred.

Like all other schools of fine art, this Elizabethan drama had its origin in immemorial convention. Long before the Renaissance or the Reformation had begun to stir England, certain popular dramatic practices had existed there. Among the earliest were the Miracle plays, in which Scriptural stories, with much grotesque interlude, were enacted, on Church festivals, by the guilds of various towns. A little later came less elaborate Moralities, in which personified Virtues and Vices stalked through didactic conventionalities. About the same time came traces of more popular in-

terludes, such as that grotesque "Masque of the Worthies" which enlivens the tedious length of "Love's Labour's Lost." When this kind of archaic drama was at its trivial best, the Renaissance had more than dawned, and scholarly people were trying to impose on England, just as they successfully tried to impose on Italy and on France, the dogmatic conventions which they believed to have controlled the inherently excellent dramas of antiquity. "Gorboduc," the first printed English tragedy, commended itself to the taste of Sidney because it is drearily Senecan in form. "Ralph Roister Doister" and "Gammer Gurton's Needle," commonly thought of as our earliest printed comedies, are closely modelled on Plautus and Terence. Yet all three are English in substance. "Gorboduc" translates into dramatic form just such a legendary chronicle of national history as Shakspere, a generation later, translated into "Lear" and "Macbeth." "Ralph Roister Doister" is full of such horse-play as boisterously delighted the spectators of miracles and interludes; and "Gammer Gurton's Needle," for all its classic form, tells a rudely comic story which might have come straight from some of Chaucer's more humble characters—the Miller or the Wife of Bath. Even this most classic phase of the English drama was not contentedly obedient to the spirit of classicism; and, by the time of Sidney's "Defence of Poesie," the popular theatre had sprung into a wildly romantic luxuriance, of which he gently and fruitlessly expounded

what seemed to him the errors. A very little later came some plays in which the two spirits were fused —the comedies of Lily, which succeeded his "Euphues."

Lily's plays resemble his novels. They have little permanent merit; but their inexhaustible ingenuity of situation and of phrase prove him once more a master of novelty. He instinctively knew his public; and he had that shallow kind of originality which enables men to do for the first time things which abler men shall by and by do better. He wrote mostly for the companies of child-actors who were gathered for various purposes of public performance in the choirs of the Royal Chapel and of St. Paul's. He took his plots mostly from the classics, then so newly revived that classical stories were for a while once more a source not of tears but of joy. He set forth these stories with all the structural freedom permitted by the rude dramatic traditions of native England. And he graced his extravagances of structure with a dialogue as ingeniously unexpected and polished in its turns as was the already popular style of his "Euphues." Up to this time there may have been doubt whether the growing English drama should take a classic or a romantic form. The popular romanticism of Lily virtually settled the question. The romantic drama was not only to be popular; it was to be a matter of fashion as well.

Meanwhile, with the establishment of regular thea-

tres, there had arisen a school of popular playwrights whose business was to supply, on short demand, plays which should please the general public. Scapegraces from the universities, as a rule, these careless poets—whom even the extensive charity of that pristine time held hardly fit for holy orders—went to wretched ends in such taverns as Shakspere shows us in Henry IV. At least one of them—Marlowe, by far the most gifted—left fragments of imaginative poetry, interspersed in worthless stuff, which make the squalid story of his premature death more tragic than any of those he set forth. And the very inequality of his careless work, vivified by the occasional flashes of his genius, throws light on its true character. Nowadays a playright is generally expected either to invent his plot, or frankly to announce that he has adapted the work of some one else, who proceeds to claim share in the copyright. Elizabethan playwrights never dreamed of such refinements. In the literature which which was springing up about them, particularly in chronicles and translations, they found plenty of interesting stories. These they took for their material, translating them, or what parts of them they chanced to fancy, into terms of dialogue and action. And thus translating, rather than in any sense creating, they found their wits free to make lovely novelties of phrase—like the novelties which had assured the popularity of Lily, and Sidney, and Spenser.

By the time when Shakspere came to London—Mr.

Sidney Lee believes that he came in 1586—these reckless old translators of tales into dramas had begun to develop several varieties of play, which modern criticism has chosen to classify. The most characteristic was the chronicle history, a frank translation into dramatic terms of passages, usually covering whole reigns, from such contemporary chroniclers as Stowe or Holinshed. Chronicle histories made no pretence to dramatic coherence or unity; but people who sat through them came away satisfied with rant, pageantry, and a misty idea that they had agreeably acquired historical information. Another kind of play, which was not always quite distinct, was the tragedy of blood—or better, of blood and thunder, as we should say to-day. These tragedies translated into dramatic form the most wildly sensational tales of battle, murder, sudden death, and madness which their authors could discover in the crude fictions of chap-books or wherever else. Chronicle history ripened into Marlowe's masterpiece—"Edward II." The tragedy of blood appears most distinctly in the work of Kyd. Lily, as we have seen already, was making ingeniously graceful comedies at the same time. And there was another kind of more broadly romantic comedy, of which one finds traces in the work of Greene and of Peele.

The very mention of these names suggests another fact, which was true of all the old playwrights. These hasty translators of narrative into drama were so apt

to work in careless collaboration that you can hardly ever feel sure that any given scene of the period is all by one hand. What you can assert is that all of them alike seem animated by the same experimental spirit which animated the more serious and more respectable literature of their time; that all were addressing a public enthusiastically eager for novelty; and that each seemed able to provide some novelty of a faintly specific kind. Marlowe was at once sensational and nobly imaginative; Kyd was so boldly sensational that no one stopped to remark his dulness of imagination; Lily scintillated with pretty ingenuities; Greene and Peele were freely, volubly romantic. All alike were purveyors of novelty to a public which craved it. All alike were men of a period, of a moment whose more formal literature was alive with a spirit of enthusiastic experiment.

To understand Shakspere, we must keep this spirit and these facts in mind. Once for all, of course, we must admit the mystery of his genius; we must grant his ineffable power of creating things which have immortally survived the human conditions of their creation. But we need not fall into the superstition of supposing that in his own time he could have seemed superhuman. Uncertain as literary chronology remains, enough is known to prove the chief facts of his personal and artistic history. He came to London when the first school of English playwrights—the school at which we have glanced—had just begun to

display its powers and its limits. He made himself one of them. The others soon died: Greene, for example, came to a miserable end in 1592; a year later, Marlowe was killed in a drunken brawl. Shakspere lived on, for a while almost the only survivor of this early time. Then, after a few years, a new and far more sophisticated school of playwrights arose. With these, as with the earlier school, Shakspere was contemporary; and he was the only one of the Elizabethan dramatists whose career thus chanced to cover the two distinct periods of the drama—that of its rise and that of its decline. Again, the better one knows his surroundings, the more clearly one begins to perceive that his chief peculiarity, when compared with his contemporaries, was a somewhat sluggish avoidance of needless invention. When anyone else had done a popular thing, Shakspere was pretty sure to imitate him and to do it better. But he hardly ever did anything first. To his contemporaries he must have seemed deficient in originality, at least as compared with Lily, or Marlowe, or Ben Jonson, or Beaumont and Fletcher. He was the most obviously imitative dramatist of all—following rather than leading superficial fashion. And so his work now appears to be the most versatile of all; his imitative variety is so comprehensive, indeed, that one can illustrate from Shakspere alone the whole history of dramatic literature during the twenty-five years of his creative life.

This imitativeness of Shakspere's—his comparative

lack of superficial originality—is most obvious in his earlier work. His first recorded publication, "Venus and Adonis," which appeared during the year when Marlowe was killed, is certainly the best example in English of its peculiar kind of versified narrative. With equal certainty, there were already in our language a number of these free metrical versions of classical stories, glowing with such temper as one feels beneath the pagan canvases of Titian. Before this time Shakspere had certainly done years of work as a dramatic hack-writer for the popular theatres; and there is fair reason to believe that he had already written "Love's Labour's Lost," "Henry VI.," "Titus Andronicus," the "Comedy of Errors," and the "Two Gentlemen of Verona." None of these resembles "Venus and Adonis"; what is more, none is much like any of the others; but each has much in common with popular work already set forth by somebody else. "Love's Labour's Lost" is obviously in the manner of Lily. "Henry VI.," certainly collaborative but certainly too vivified by true Shaksperian touches, is a chronicle history of the earlier kind: Greene and Peele were the chief makers of such plays until Marlowe developed the type into his almost masterly "Edward II." "Titus Andronicus," so often repudiated by sentimental people as unworthy, but surely attributed to Shakspere during his lifetime, is a tragedy of blood, much in the manner of Kyd. The "Comedy of Errors" adapts for popular presentation

a familiar kind of Latin comedy. The "Two Gentlemen of Verona" is an experiment in the sort of romantic comedy which Shakspere soon made more his own than any other form of drama. The real nature of Shakspere's power begins to appear. He was by far the most versatile dramatist of all. If he rarely did anything for the first time, he tried his hand at almost everything which anyone else had attempted; and he did almost everything better than it had been done before. Yet, after six or seven years of work, he had hardly written a page which fully indicated the power which was in him.

Except as a phrase-maker. Each of these plays, and "Venus and Adonis," too, contains, one may confidently say, a greater number of admirable and beautiful detached phrases than are to be found in any work of equal length by any of his contemporaries. No fact could go much further to show how normally Elizabethan his early temper was. Those years were years when the whole world—not only the dramatists but the poets and the writers of ingenious prose as well—were enthusiastically playing with words, eager to discover every effect of which our newly tamed language was gracefully capable. And Shakspere's phrases have proved more memorable than the rest only because his mind chanced to be of that rare kind in which words and concepts seem almost identical. When other men juggled with words, he unwittingly juggled with ideas as well; so where others only

punned he unwittingly intermingled astonishing varieties of thought. This fact, however, no contemporary could have known; to be assured of wisdom, a phrase must stand the test of the centuries. In his own time, accordingly, Shakspere must have begun by seeming chiefly noteworthy as the most versatile among countless nimble makers of phrase.

And then followed the few years when the elder playwrights were dead, and the later had hardly begun their work; the years when Shakspere was virtually alone. Broadly speaking, these were the years between the death of Marlowe, in 1593, and that of Spenser, in 1599. In 1600 an exceptional number of quartos attested how popular Shakspere had become meanwhile. He did so much, and what he did was so extraordinary, that we have no choice left us but to speed over the story. In brief, he brought tragedy to the point of "Romeo and Juliet," where for a while he left it. He developed chronicle history through the successive stages of "Richard III.," "Richard II.," and "King John," until, in "Henry IV." and "Henry V.," he virtually invented a new kind of literature—historical fiction. He awakened comedy into the fantasy of the "Midsummer Night's Dream"; he carried it through the glowing romance of the "Merchant of Venice"; and he brought it to the complete maturity of "Much Ado About Nothing," "As You Like It," and "Twelfth Night." Meanwhile, he had surely written some of his sonnets. Mr. Sidney

Lee, indeed, the most authoritative of recent critics, refers all the sonnets to an earlier period still.

This second period of Shakspere's work proves, like the first, varied, versatile, in some degree experimental. The difference lies in the kindling force of his imagination. This has finally passed beyond the stage of phrase-making; it has breathed life into character after character who have proved immortal—Romeo, Juliet, and Mercutio; Shylock and Portia; Falstaff; Benedick and Beatrice, and the rest. It has developed into full vitality what had previously been the archaic conventions of chronicle history and of romantic comedy. It has made the greatest known tragedy of youthful love. It has been able to suffuse each separate work of its creation with an atmosphere as distinct as those we breathe in separate regions of actual earth. And, if the Sonnets truly belong here, it has achieved the highest work of that elaborately artificial literary fashion which Wyatt and Surrey started and which Sidney made permanent.

Whether Shakspere's sonnets are autobiographic or mere feats of rhetoric, one thing is surely true of them. They imitated approved models; they followed the fashion, and did not lead it. Taken quite by themselves, as modern readers are apt to take them, they may well seem the key with which the poet unlocked his heart. If so, "the less Shakspere he." For, taken in their relation to the hundreds of sonnets which enriched English between 1590 and 1600, they seem

little else than another piece of conclusive proof that what other men had done well, Shakspere could always do better.

The subject-matter of the sonnets, like that of all Elizabethan sequences, is love—the varying moods through which a lover is bound to pass. And love, when set forth by one who even pretends to be an earnest lover, is bound to seem serious. Serious, too, must seem the utterances of emotion and the developments of character in any drama or other fiction which attains the excellence of lasting vitality. So, indeed, must aphorism and other mere turns of phrase, if the phrase-maker, while ingeniously juggling with words, has even unwittingly mingled with those words concepts which accidentally combine in pregnancy of thought. It is no wonder that if Shakspere had never written another line than those at which we have glanced, he would have seemed to half mankind not only an eminent dramatist and poet, but also a weighty philosopher. Yet it does not follow that he meant to be one, or even suspected that anyone could think him so.

We must grant, to begin with, the mystery of his genius. We must grant that to him, more than to any other man who has written our language, words and concepts were almost identical. We must grant that the slow but constant kindling of his imaginative power had begun so to glow that he could not help wakening to life the stiffly conventional characters

which he found, as little more than names, in the tales and the fictions he adapted for the stage. We must grant, too, that by this time his imagination could not help suffusing each new drama with a subtle, unmistakable atmosphere of its own. And we must remember that he came to the fulness of his power at the moment when that wonderful Elizabethan world was in the very heyday of its enthusiastic experiment. Granting and remembering all this, we can hardly fail to see that even though he worked with no deeper conscious purpose than an effort to do more effectively things which other men had already done well, he would probably have produced just such results as we have the happiness to possess. This explanation of him is the simplest. To seek in him for more, to fancy him a deliberate philosopher or teacher, seems wanton disregard of the principle that what may be rationally explained need not be held a miracle.

Thus considered, Shakspere, in 1600, seems something more than our supreme poet. He proves to be also a man of his time—an Elizabethan. And, again and again, the qualities which the fact of his survival have made so many of us fancy peculiar to him prove qualities which we have found in the work of the fading dramatists and poets who, in his own time, seemed living as steadily as he. By a happy chance, his career fell in the very midst of the epoch whose meaning his works express. Besides his essential greatness, then, he chances actually to be the one

Elizabethan poet in whose work we may most surely feel the full national temper of his time.

That national temper—the character of England when the seventeenth century began—is what we are attempting to perceive together. It is hard to define, yet not hard to know. We have seen enough, even in this hasty glance, to remind ourselves of its most certain feature—a momentary national integrity. Elizabethans, like all other men, differed among themselves; but their England was a world where, for a little while, one can feel first the characteristics which men have in common and only afterward those which distinguish them apart from one another. The makers of lyric poems, the workers in our elder prose, and Lily, and Sidney, and Spenser, and the dramatists, and even Shakspere himself, were first of all men of that eager, buoyant time, remembered still in tradition as the heroic age of England.

And the quality of English character in that vigorous elder integrity has a sort of youthful ardor which suffuses every phase of its expression. In life as in letters, those years were years of exploration, of experiment, of spontaneous, enthusiastic, versatile eagerness to discover the mysteries which lurked, wherever the bodies or the souls of men might stray, beyond the bounds of the horizon.

On the coins of old Spain there is a device which comes to mind whenever I try to define this spirit. The shield of Castile and Leon was supported by two

columns—the Pillars of Hercules, Gibraltar and the Moorish hill across the Strait, which marked the limit of the Old World. But the motto speaks of no limit. "Plus Ultra," it runs—there is more beyond. And what that more might be no man could know. So forth they went in search of El Dorado, and of the fountains of Eternal Youth, coasting and spying, among the rest, that continent, now ours, which the centuries have shown to be the destined nursery of English-speaking democracy.

"Plus Ultra" seems the motto best fitting Elizabethan literature, when the seventeenth century began. Fifty years before, the language of England was still untamed; even twelve years before, when the Armada was cleared from the Channel, English literature had hardly commenced flourishing. Now, eager experiment, eagerly welcomed, had proved our English not only a lastingly efficient vehicle of record and of reason. It had asserted for English a lyric power unsurpassed by that of any other tongue. It had shown that the English language could be made the instrument of civilized literature. Above all, this eager experiment had awakened into being a new kind of drama, more varied and more flexible than any known before, and hardly less lofty than the very Greek. And all this had been summarized and typified in the early career of Shakspere, still doing better and better. Wherever he had approached the limits of literature, these limits had receded, as mists fade before a morn-

ing sun. There were no Pillars of Hercules left, except as a gate into the unexplored wealth and mysteries of the world beyond. And what lay there no man could tell, or stopped for the while to guess. All pressed on.

Our task henceforth will be to trace the way in which new limitations closed about them. Shakspere himself felt a check, long before his end. And after his time came more changes and more; these we are to consider together by and by. But now, we need look no further than we have gone. When the seventeenth century began, "Plus Ultra" seemed a fit motto for all the national temper of England: there was more beyond.

II

THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE DRAMA.

When the seventeenth century began, we have seen, the national temper of England, as expressed in literature, was enthusiastic, spontaneous, and versatile. More clearly still—when we hastily traced the outburst of lyric poetry, the growth of serviceable prose, the literary fantasies and achievements of Lily, of Sidney, and of Spenser, and, above all, the development of the drama into the full ripeness of Shakspere's chronicle histories and comedies—we found that national temper integral. For all their differences, every one of the Elizabethan poets and writers—even to Shakspere himself—seemed adventurously experimental. "Plus Ultra" seemed the motto for those buoyant days; beyond the Pillars of Hercules there was more than any voyager into strange seas of thought could know beforehand.

Henceforth our effort will be to trace the changes in this national temper, until—a century later—England, at least in its literary expression, had become so different from that elder Elizabethan world—an elder world from which not only modern England, but modern America, too, can surely trace its origin.

And first, we shall consider what happened to the two forms of literature which, in 1600, had reached the highest development—lyric poetry and the drama.

We may best consider them separately. Within half a century each had changed conspicuously. Both had disintegrated; but while lyric verse still flourished disintegrally, the drama had declined. And even had their courses been more nearly parallel, there would be reason why we should first attend to the drama by itself. For, as I hastily said when we first turned to it, the history of the English drama from its awakening under Elizabeth to its extinction under Charles I. affords a remarkably clear and typical example of literary evolution. By studying its course, we may discover more than its mere history; we may perceive how any school of art—Greek sculpture, if you like, Gothic architecture, Florentine or Venetian painting —rises, flourishes, and decays.

In brief, whatever school of human expression is destined to reach vitality originates from certain fixed, immemorial conventions rather blindly followed in a manner which we may broadly call archaic. The painted statues which excavation has restored to light in the Museum of the Acropolis are examples of this; so are the mosaics of Ravenna or of St. Mark's; so are the English miracle plays and moralities. To a people long bound by such archaic convention comes an impulse, no doubt traceable to external forces, but known to themselves chiefly, if not only, as freshened

imaginative activity. They suddenly feel, they seem instinctively to perceive, how things may be altered in the direction of truth and beauty. When such impulse comes, it seems for a while illimitable; there seems no reason why achievement should not advance forever, stronger and nobler with each new effort. So the art, whatever it is, surges ahead—often wildly and luxuriantly, in great degree abortively, in some degree immortally. Then, by and by, comes an insidious sense of the limits which human conditions and human powers must always impose on humanity. No tower based on earth can ever soar to the true heavens; at best it can only lift its summit a little higher heavenward. So a benumbing sense of fact begins inexorably to check the imaginative impulse which a little while before burst so irresistibly from the bonds of old conventions; and in new conventional traditions, in contented or restless consciousness of limitation, the art declines into a new lifelessness.

There are many moods, accordingly, in which one is disposed to think of human expression much as one thinks of physical phenomena throughout the living world. Wildly various and strong and individual as these may seem, they prove, in truth, nothing more various or individual than cumulative examples of how those great forces work which we begin to recognize as natural law. When we take whatever fragment we like from the beautiful, confused intricacy of nature, and study its parts in their relations, we find

slowly growing in our minds an image of such deathless, inexorable order as the mere contemplation of fact at any given moment could never reveal. Astronomy has thus emerged into colossal truth; geology, too; physics is following; biology and all the human facts which we may include within it stand ready for deathless words which shall flash newer and ever newer cosmic order into the midst of receding chaos. And even we students of literature cannot, and should not, resist that truest imaginative impulse of our own time; we should ourselves be anachronisms if we were content only to enjoy the splendidly confused creations of the art we love—if we did not eagerly strive to perceive and to define the relations in which they really stand to one another.

In fine art, as in all Nature else, phenomena appear inextricably intermingled. The simplicity of laboratories is magnificently artificial. The order of law, as we can state it, is never the same as the aspect of fact. So accidents of chronology rarely combine with accidents of expression to define such generalizations as I have just tried to suggest. In the case of the Elizabethan drama, they come near doing so. The uncertainties of date which still confuse the minute history of this school of literature do not confuse its outline. We need hardly lament longer that such uncertainties persist. Rather we may count ourselves fortunate to possess two passages, so definitely fixed as to be trustworthy in date, and so unmistakably

phrased as to afford remarkable examples of how imagination breaks the limits of old conventions, and of how, after the brief period when imagination and sense of fact have been immortally fused, a crushing sense of fact slowly and inexorably checks the further aspirations of imagination, imposing new conventions on an art which is no longer free.

Marlowe's "Tamburlaine," published in 1590, was probably acted at just about the time when Shakespere came to London. Among other things, it is believed finally to have made popular and inevitable on our stage the blank verse in which our lasting dramatic works were phrased. Whether the prologue was written before the play was published, nobody knows; but it was surely published in 1590, before Shakspere had emerged from the experiments of what has been called his apprenticeship; and here it is:

> From jigging veins of rhyming mother-wits,
> And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
> We'll lead you to the stately tent of war.
> Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine
> Threatening the world with high astounding terms,
> And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.
> View but his picture in this tragic glass,
> And then applaud his fortunes as you please.

If no other words of Marlowe's were left us, these would tell what Jonson meant when he wrote of "Marlowe's mighty line"; they would express, too, that spirit of imaginative aspiration, bursting the bonds

of convention, which breathes throughout Marlowe's fragmentary and colossal work. Twenty-two years after this prologue was published—perhaps twenty-five after it was written—there was published, in turn, the first complete work of John Webster, the "White Devil." The year in which this was printed, 1612, coincides with the close of Shakspere's career even more closely than that in which "Tamburlaine" was probably written coincides with its beginning. Shakspere began his work just when Marlowe broke the shackles of old conventions, and ended it just before John Webster prefaced his first play with the following words:

"Detraction is the sworn friend to ignorance: for mine own part, I have ever truly cherished my good opinion of other men's worthy labours; especially of that full and heightened style of Master Chapman; the laboured and understanding works of Master Jonson; the no less worthy composures of the both worthily excellent Master Beaumont and Master Fletcher; and lastly (without wrong last to be named) the right happy and copious industry of Master Shakespeare, Master Dekker, and Master Heywood; wishing what I write may be read by their light; protesting that, in the strength of mine own judgment, I know them so worthy, that though I rest silent in my own work, yet to most of theirs I dare (without flattery) fix that of Martial,

—non norunt haec monumenta mori."

You shall search literature far and wide for a more concrete statement of how a limiting sense of fact benumbs into new conventionality a school of art which has become consciously aware that it must obey tradition. Marlowe speaks of old, enfeebled, broken bonds; Webster of those bonds with which the giants themselves replaced the ancient ones they had splendidly disdained.

And so back to Shakspere. Webster thought him only one of many dramatic poets; to us he has emerged supreme. Of the playwrights living in 1612, and mentioned by Webster as his masters, Shakspere, in point of publication, was the eldest. When we last considered him, in 1600, his work consisted of his histories, his comedies, "Romeo and Juliet," and perhaps the Sonnets. Now, in 1612, his career was finished. That very statement is enough to remind us of what he had accomplished during the first twelve years of the seventeenth century. He had produced "Julius Cæsar," "Measure for Measure," the four great tragedies, "Antony and Cleopatra," and "Coriolanus"; then, perhaps after a brief collaborative interval, to which "Timon" and "Pericles" are attributed, he had made his three great romances—"Cymbeline," the "Tempest," and the "Winter's Tale"; finally he had done his collaborative part, whatever it was, in "Henry VIII."; so an end. Here is matter enough for a lifetime of conferences like ours. In this glance at the latter half of Shakspere's work, we

must neglect all detail and generalize with what may well seem bewildering swiftness.

These works of Shakspere clearly divide themselves into two groups, different from each other and still more different from what he had written before. Broadly speaking, we may call the first group tragic and the second romantic. In the tragic group, there is little trace left of the robust cheerfulness which marked his histories and his comedies. Instead we have a crescent emphasis on three distinct, though intermingled, phases of inexorable tragic fact: the irony of fate, the mischief women can work, and the horrors of madness. Meanwhile his style, the texture of his verse, slowly intensifies. From the beginning his words had been charged with concepts beyond the words of other men. Now, his thought grows overwhelming, sometimes to the point of distortion, finally to what approaches obscurity. It is as if the marriage of word and meaning in his mind were growing old—as if meaning were enforcing its control more and more, like some powerful mate who proves at last the dominant partner in what once seemed equal wedlock. There was more beauty, perhaps, in the elder time; now there is inestimably more power and passion and significance.

Then, if we may trust our conjectural chronology, comes a sudden cessation of power—in "Coriolanus," what seems a colossal chill of exhaustion; in "Timon" and "Pericles" something like momentary impotence.

Finally, in the three romances, comes a new temper and a new manner. Comedy and tragedy are finally fused. Things go ill for a while, but tend to happy ends. As the "Tempest" clears, the ideal world where it has played its mimic life is suffused with the radiance of an ideal philosophy. The verse, meanwhile, still overcharged with meaning, grows so flexibly informal under the weight thereof that if you playfully read it aloud as prose, he must have a fine ear who should detect your prank. I touch on this merely technical matter because, in itself, it is strongly typical of artistic decline. Marlowe, with his mighty line, broke away from the "jigging veins" of the careless old playwrights. Then, for a while, blank verse, with growing elasticity, seemed eternally able to sustain any burden of significance which the poets would have it bear. By and by it began to bend under the tasks imposed on it. By Webster's time it had left the jigging veins far behind; but at that same time its vigor and outburst had subsided into something little different from the daily speech of men. For the while blank verse had reached its limits. As it struggled against them, its sustaining power weakened, its surging spirit seemed almost broken.

But all this should not distract us from our chief question now; namely, what we may best believe the double change in Shakspere's utterances to signify. From a buoyant poet he became a tragic, and finally a romantic. The first impulse of critics who recog-

nized this course of his development was to believe it due to his own spiritual experience. Without question it may thus be explained. Suppose, for example, that, unwelcomely married at Stratford, he came to London, and made his way there, and met some woman of higher rank than he had known before, and fell in love with her; that he found her faithless, and suffered accordingly; and finally that he surmounted the suffering. Then consider some of his heroines—Juliet, Portia, Beatrice; the haunting doubts about Hero; the dark lady of the Sonnets; Ophelia, Cressida, Desdemona; the daughters of Lear; Lady Macbeth; and Cleopatra. Here are keys, it might seem, with which he unlocked chamber after chamber of his heart. And then came Imogen, and Miranda, and Perdita, like the glowing rays of some serene sunset. Whatever the truth, there is hardly anywhere a more consistent expression of the stages through which a lover passes who yields himself reverently to the fascination of a woman; who finds her, after a while, an object of doubt; who then has the agony to know her certainly unworthy; yet who ends by rising from the depths in which all this misery has plunged him, and by finding consolation in charity and in self-mastery. All of which conjectural story hangs upon the autobiographic truth of those sonnets about the reprehensible lady with dark hair.

Mr. Sidney Lee, as we saw, has finally demonstrated how unlikely it is that these sonnets have personal

origin. At least it is certain that they admirably follow, and develop into excellence, a literary form which other men had not long before made the fashion. There is no need to assume that they reveal a new Shakspere. They are explicable if we regard him still as that supremely imitative man of letters whose experimental work had proved him so versatile; whose impulse, from the beginning, had been not to express himself—if, indeed, he had any conscious self to express—but only to do incomparably better things which more adventurously original men had already done well.

A young American scholar whose name has hardly yet crossed the Atlantic—Professor Ashley Horace Thorndike—has lately made some studies in dramatic chronology which go far to confirm the unromantic conjecture that to the end Shakspere remained imitative, and little else. Professor Thorndike, for example, has shown with convincing probability that certain old plays concerning Robin Hood proved popular; a little later, Shakspere produced the woods and the outlaws of "As You Like It." The question is one of pure chronology; and pure chronology has convinced me, for one, that the forest scenes of Arden were written to fit available costumes and properties—that the green raiment of the banished duke was an Elizabethan prototype of the tubs of Mr. Vincent Crummles. Again, Professor Thorndike has shown that Roman subjects grew popular, and

tragedies of revenge, such as Marston's; a little later Shakspere wrote "Julius Cæsar" and "Hamlet." With much more elaboration, Professor Thorndike has virtually proved that the romances of Beaumont and Fletcher—different both in motive and in style from any popular plays which had preceded them—were conspicuously successful on the London stage before Shakspere began to write romances. It seems likely, therefore, that "Cymbeline," which less careful chronology had conjectured to be a model for Beaumont and Fletcher, was, in fact, imitated from models which they had made. In other words, Professor Thorndike has shown that we may account for all the changes in Shakspere, after 1600, by merely assuming that the most skilful and instinctive imitator among the early Elizabethan dramatists remained till the end an instinctively imitative follower of fashions set by others.

Incomparably more simple I find this explanation than the old, romantic one; and incomparably more significant, as well, to anyone who has been perplexed to know why Shakspere's work, arranged in chronologic order, proves so broadly typical of literary evolution. If we clearly understand that he chanced to live at a time when the Elizabethan drama passed through almost its whole course from "Tamburlaine" to the "White Devil"; and if we admit that his persistent tendency was to imitate changing fashions, there is no puzzle left. As students of literary his-

tory we have only to sketch in details of the picture which Shakspere's career comprehends in outline.

In this task no guide is more helpful than that preface of Webster's, published, as we have seen, just as Shakspere stopped writing. "Without wrong to be named the last," you will remember, he mentions Shakspere, carelessly grouped with Dekker and Heywood, only after he has somewhat more respectfully named Chapman, Jonson, and Beaumont and Fletcher.

Of the six men thus hastily mentioned by Webster, four began their careers as dramatists before 1600. We may find it convenient to consider them first, and, indeed, to mention one or two other men, whom Webster neglects, before we turn to Beaumont and Fletcher. For these slightly earlier writers indicate only the disintegration of the Elizabethan drama. It is in the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, in those of Webster himself, and in those of men who followed a little after 1612, that the decadence and exhaustion of the drama become unmistakable.

First, then, for Chapman, eldest and longest-lived of them all. "That full and heightened style of Master Chapman" was the ray of light he cast by which Webster would have his own work read. As you turn page after page of the three fat little ill-printed volumes in which Chapman's copious utterances are most easily accessible, you feel Webster's criticism just. Only one of these volumes comprises Chapman's dramatic work; the others contain his great version

of Homer, his completion of Marlowe's "Hero and Leander," and sundry original poems. Neither these original poems nor his plays have truly survived; it is only as translator of Homer that anyone reads Chapman now. As translator of Homer, however, he remains eminent. We need only recall Keat's sonnet to be assured that, whatever the verdict of modern scholarship, Chapman's translation is a great Elizabethan poem. After the manner of his time, Chapman held Homer at once the earliest and the greatest of poets, and he believed poets to be literally the vehicles of divine inspiration. In translating Homer, accordingly, he felt himself a conduit of divine truth; and as such he seems to have held himself most worthy of lasting esteem. Indeed, he himself virtually asserts this conviction, in peculiarly characteristic terms. On the quaint title-page which preserves his portrait, he calls himself "Homeri Metaphrastes." That last word tells something of what Webster had in mind when he characterized Chapman's style. One sees instantly what "Metaphrastes" means; but when I looked for it once in some Latin and Greek dictionaries, I could not find it. Doubtless Chapman found it somewhere; and very probably he chose it mostly because the place where he found it was a little out of the way. He liked the word because it was more full and heightened than any obvious one.

A scholar meanwhile, this same word shows him; and when he turned himself to poetry he wrote in a

spirit of didactic pedantry. His plays are as free as any in the language from the artificial restraints of pseudo-classic form; but so far as human interest goes, they are as lifeless as the most slavish parody of Plautus or Seneca ever made by anybody. His comedies are confused masses of conventional intrigue. Of his tragedies, the most memorable translate into ten acts of pompous declamation an almost contemporary tale of French life—the same which Dumas, some fifty years ago, awakened into the perennial, if trivial, vitality of "La Dame de Monsoreau." The plays of Chapman could never have been popular. In the dedication of the "Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois" he incidentally tells us why: "For the authentical truth of either person or action," he writes, "who (worth the respecting) will expect it in a poem, whose subject is not truth, but things like truth? . . . material instruction, elegant and sententious excitation to virtue, and deflection from her contrary, being the soul, limbs, and limits of an authentical tragedy." Accordingly, when, in the very tragedy which he thus defends, he was moved to touch on poetry—and a true poet, he honestly held, must be divinely inspired—we find his inspiration breathing out the following lines:

> As worthiest poets
> Shun common and plebeian forms of speech,
> Every illiberal and affected phrase
> To clothe their matter; and together tie
> Matter and form, with art and decency;
> So worthiest women should shun vulgar guises.

Compare these cool lucubrations with the passionate idealism of what Marlowe, who was younger than Chapman in years, as well as in spirit, had uttered concerning poets, in "Tamburlaine," a good while before:

> If all the pens that ever poets held
> Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,
> And every sweetness that inspir'd their hearts,
> Their minds, and muses on admired themes;
> If all the heavenly quintessence they still
> From their immortal flowers of poesy,
> Wherein, as in a mirror, we perceive
> The highest reaches of a human wit;
> If these had made one poem's period,
> And all combin'd in beauty's worthiness,
> Yet should there hover in their restless heads
> One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,
> Which into words no virtue could digest.

Compare Chapman's lines with what Shakspere—like Marlowe, younger than Chapman—had sung of poetry in the "Midsummer Night's Dream":

> The lunatic, the lover and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact:
> One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;
> That is the madman: the lover, all as frantic,
> Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:
> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.

Compare Chapman's lines even with what Ben Jonson had written of poetry in the "Poetaster":

> If she be
> True-born, and nursed with all the sciences, . . .
> She can so mould Rome and her monuments
> Within the liquid marble of her lines
> That they shall live, fresh and miraculous,
> Even when they mix with innovating dust.

You can hardly help feeling the difference between Chapman's lines and all the others; and feeling it, you will surely feel where this crabbed, wise, didactic Chapman belongs, with that full and heightened style which makes him, some hold, the dramatic moralist best worth pondering after Shakspere himself.

"The laboured and understanding works of Master Jonson," Webster names next. "Works" was what Jonson himself called his writings when, four years later, he collected them in a folio; and the name gave rise to sundry jests, for the greater part of these avowed works took the form of plays. This Ben Jonson, from whom they proceeded, chances to be the best-recorded literary figure of his time. For not only do his voluminous works reveal many phases of his assertive personality, but the note-book in which William Drummond, of Hawthornden, set down the particulars of a somewhat unwelcome visit from Jonson, in 1619, preserves detail of his talk with almost Boswellian fidelity. Of his blustering, half-

bibulous assertions, the most familiar, and perhaps the most characteristic is, that "Shakspere wanted art." Preposterous as the statement now seems, it was one which Jonson would seriously have maintained, thereby implicitly defining his own position in the history of our dramatic literature. Among the later Elizabethan playwrights—"Every Man in His Humour," his first published play, was acted in 1598—Jonson was the most sturdy upholder of such pseudo-classic standards as imposed themselves on the theatres of France and of Italy.

In fact, Jonson was thorough master of two things —of the later Roman classics and of vernacular English. Convivial in habit, too, and on friendly terms with people of every social class, he knew the outward aspect of Elizabethan London remarkably well. The paradox of his work, accordingly, is pretty deep; the actual life which he knew, and of which he laboriously endeavored to record the meaning, was the life of a Renaissance, full of youthful ardor. The terms in which he strove to express this meaning were often those of an almost senile foreign literature. His mood is apt to be that of the Roman satirists—of Juvenal or of Martial, who were historically men of a world-decadence; he often translates their very words into the free vernacular terms of an English whose history, in his day, was not past but future.

Like his fellow-scholar, Chapman, he held that a poet is essentially a teacher; and far more than Chap-

man—more, indeed, than any other of the dramatists—he maintained and proclaimed doctrinal orthodoxy of form. In his introduction to "Sejanus," he stoutly writes: "If it be objected, that what I publish is no true poem, in the strict laws of time, I confess it; as also in the want of a proper chorus; whose habits and moods are such and so difficult, as not any, whom I have seen, since the ancients, no, not they who have most presently affected laws, have yet come in the way of. . . . If in truth of argument, dignity of persons, gravity and height of elocution, fulness and frequency of sentence, I have discharged the other offices of a tragic writer, let not the absence of those forms be imputed to me." And he goes on to refer his copious annotations to the editions of Tacitus, Suetonius, and the rest, which he followed. And Shakspere, a little while before, had swiftly turned passages from North's Plutarch into his freely English "Julius Cæsar," half chronicle-history, half tragedy of revenge. Shakspere never troubled himself about either the rules of classical form or the authenticity of his historical material. If art be really what Jonson evidently maintained it to be, Shakspere—thank God—really lacked art.

This art, this conscious setting forth of his material in accordance with what he believed to be absolute law, is the quality in which Jonson excels. He was far enough from Puritanism; but no Puritan ever obeyed more dominant conscience. He did things not

as he felt like doing them, but as he laboriously came to understand that they ought to be done.

Yet his plays, whatever their comparative rigidity in the midst of their freely romantic surroundings, are not a bit like the pseudo-classic plays of France or Italy. The reasons for this I conceive to be several. In the first place, as is well known, Jonson's theory of comedy required that each personage should embody some characteristic trait to the exclusion of others. In the language of his time, the title of his first comedy is an apt motto for them all. Every man, throughout Jonson, is in his humor; the leading peculiarity of each and all is emphasized, in the spirit of Roman satire, until each and all become monstrosities, or at best caricatures. In the second place, as I have said before, Jonson was completely saturated with the temper of decadent Roman literature. So his humorous characters were generally taken not so much from the London life he knew so well as from the records of a totally different phase of a different civilization. The annotated editions of his works reveal, again and again, passages directly translated from ancient texts. As his contemporaries translated stories into terms of speech and action, so he translated the "gravity and height of elocution, fulness and frequency of sentence" which took his fancy in the course of his studies; and these he translated into free terms of vernacular Elizabethan English. It is the consummate idiom of his English which pre-

vents us from instantly recognizing how far from English are the thoughts and emotions which it frequently clothes. His consummate mastery of English vernacular is what makes his works seem, as in this aspect they are, so completely Elizabethan.

Compared with any other Elizabethan plays, all the while, they are very heavy reading; and for a long time I was puzzled to account for the difficulty of which I was conscious whenever I turned to them. The clue came at last from Drummond's notes. Jonson, it seems, was a ghost-seer; the spirit of his son once appeared to him; again, he would lie awake of nights, watching the visible Turks and Tartars fight about his great toe. Clearly, his imagination was unusually visual. Now, in reading Shakspere and the rest, one habitually thinks not of what their characters looked like, but of how each of the personages felt; the general temper of the Elizabethan drama is not that of outward observation, it is that of inward sympathy. Essentially the dramatists were true poets, not painters at all. Did this visualizing power of Jonson's, I asked myself, perhaps mean that, without knowing it, he conceived his scenes externally, in the spirit rather of a painter than of a poet? The ensuing experiment, of course, had only the authority of a single personal experience; but that experience surprised me. I had never found "Julius Cæsar" dull; reading "Sejanus" in such mood as that in which one reads "Julius Cæsar," I had never found "Sejanus"

tolerable. Now I turned to "Sejanus" with a deliberate effort not to sympathize with the characters, but to visualize them; not to understand but to observe. The change in effect was such that, as I have just reminded myself from an old note-book, the play kept me up long past bedtime; and "Julius Cæsar" never did that. In truth, I have come to believe, Jonson, as a dramatist, was really not a poet but a painter.

You will best feel what I mean, perhaps, if you turn to the one great play which he wrote after Webster's comment on him saw the light. This "Bartholomew Fair" seems really inspired by his experience of low life in London. Compared with the tavern scenes in "Henry IV.," however, or even with such plays as Middleton's comedies of city life, it seems ponderously confused, bewildering, inhuman. But recall your Hogarth; and with Hogarth's consummate caricatures of Georgian England floating in your fancy, turn to "Bartholomew Fair" again. If your wits work like mine, you will find it, thus approached, quivering with unsuspected vitality. You will feel, beyond the range of doubt, that if Ben Jonson had chanced to be master of his pencil rather than of his pen, he would have left us records of Elizabethan London as vivid as those which Hogarth left of the eighteenth century. All unknowing, Ben Jonson was at heart a painter.

An accident of language in America—I am not sure whether it extends to England—has made the word *artist* primarily suggest the art of painting. Had

I just said that Jonson was at heart an *artist*, the word, in America, would have intimated almost exactly what I meant. Even in America, meanwhile, it would have intimated more, too; for the word includes, of course, all fine art. Whoever, when he attempts expression, attempts to express himself in accordance with the laws of truth and of beauty, works in an artistic spirit. And in the range of Elizabethan drama, just as Chapman, with his full and heightened style, is probably the most pregnant moralist, so Jonson is assuredly the most conscientious artist.

This art of Jonson's appears not only in his plays. It appears also in the Masques with which, through the years of his laureateship, he so steadily delighted the Court; it appears, as well, in his masterly lyrics, and in those extracts from his note-books—called "Discoveries" when he printed them—which prove him a consummate master of prose too. Of these we cannot reason now; their place in our study is elsewhere. Now it is sufficient to be assured that by Webster's time "the laboured and understanding works of Master Jonson" had proved him, in principle if not in achievement, the most sturdy artist yet known to English letters. But sturdy art can do little more than pregnant moralizing to make vitally popular drama. And the popular drama of England was alive.

Examples of what it was may be found in the fragments which survive of "the right happy and copious

industry of Master Dekker and Master Heywood." Webster, you will remember, grouped them with Shakspere "(without wrong to be named last)." And, with a little hesitation, we may once more find his critical epithets well chosen. Copious they both were; it is recorded somewhere of Heywood that for years he never allowed a day to pass without at least one written page, and by 1633, as he stated in the preface to his "English Traveller," he had had "either an entire hand, or at least a main finger," in two hundred and twenty tragi-comedies. Industry, of a certain kind, this surely implies; and if we take the word "happy" in its sense of "careless," we can hardly find a better description than Webster's of the kind of industry which Dekker and Heywood exemplify.

Both began their happily and copiously industrious careers before 1600; both, in fact, were almost exactly contemporary with Jonson; both, like Jonson, wrote on and on in the times of James I.; both, like him, died under King Charles. And neither seems so to have changed with the passing of years as ever to have lost the quality which makes one feel both of them Elizabethan to the end. Neither, on the other hand, is great. For that very reason, perhaps, they more clearly embody the general spirit of their time. Yet they are not quite contemporaries of the earlier Elizabethans, with whom Shakspere began his work. For one thing, you can far sooner feel the limits of these slightly later men.

Of the two, Dekker seems the elder in temper. In all probability, too, he was the more habitually collaborative—a fact which makes him a trifle the less distinct. Yet recall his "Gull's Horn Book," in fact only a "right happy" adaptation from a Dutch pamphlet, yet the treasury which preserves some of our most vivid records of Elizabethan London; and remember his "Shoemaker's Holiday," that carelessly wholesome romantic comedy of 'prentice tradition; or surrender yourself to the careless extravagances of his fairy-tale, "Old Fortunatus," or to the "humorous" vagaries of his "Honest Whore." You need go no further to feel Dekker not only Elizabethan, but himself, too. He had a quality which we might nowadays call journalistic; if newspapers had existed in his time, he would have been a jewel of a reporter. He had the charm of kindly good-fellowship. And, being Elizabethan all the while, he not only had lyric power, but now and again he made memorable phrases. The best of these had already been published for eight years when Webster wrote of him so gently—they are in almost the last speech of the first part of the "Honest Whore":

> Patience, my lord! why, 'tis the soul of peace;
> Of all the virtues 'tis nearest kin to Heaven.
> It makes men look like gods. The best of men
> That e'er wore earth about him, was a sufferer,
> A soft, meek, patient, humble, tranquil spirit,
> The first true gentleman that ever breathed.

Compare these lines with the title of the play from which they are culled. Remember that both are characteristic of their author, and you will begin to feel what manner of man Dekker was. To remind yourselves of where he belongs in literature, the while, compare his comments on patience with Portia's lovely rhetoric about the "quality of mercy," which had first been printed four years earlier.

Like Dekker, Heywood—who wrote on well into King Charles's time—retained to the end his Elizabethan quality. And the right happy spirit of his copious industry appears in words which he published more than twenty years after Webster had invoked his example. "My plays," he says, "are not exposed unto the world in volumes, to bear the title of works; one reason is, that many of them by shifting and change of companies have been negligently lost; . . . and . . . it never was any great ambition in me to be in this kind voluminously read." Of his writing of other than dramatic kinds, meanwhile, some notion may be had from the fact that in 1624 he produced a folio of more than four hundred pages "concerning women," of which he stated that between its first conception and its final publication there had elapsed only seventeen weeks. Such of his plays as are left us—not more, at most, than one-tenth of all he made—are various in kind: chronicle-histories, extravagant romances, masques, and, most individually, what he called tragi-comedies. Nowadays we should

be more apt to call them melodramas, dealing with contemporary life. One of them is almost a masterpiece: his "Woman Killed with Kindness" tells with something like permanent veracity a story of domestic tragedy, such as the records of his time show not to have been infrequent. Even from this masterpiece, however, one derives an impression rather of what Heywood has told than of how he has told it. Among the old playwrights, he is noteworthy for lack of salient phrase. Yet his style remains Elizabethan in its freedom, its spontaneity, its ease, its adequacy. And two characteristics which appear in the "Woman Killed with Kindness" pervade his other plays too. The first of these is the remarkable truth to life of certain episodes. Nonsensical, for example, as much of his "Fair Maid of the West" undoubtedly is, you can find in its opening scenes a unique record of the surroundings from which old adventurers put forth for the Spanish Main. I, for one, can never think of them without some such feeling as might come from actual memory of gusty salt breezes, with mute messages of the Indies beyond the seas. "Heywood," I find in an old note-book, "was no master-poet, sounding the depths of nature; for that very reason, he can carelessly show us daily life the more truly." This by itself would be enough to make him memorable. But his other characteristic power is better still. Amid all the right happy carelessness of his copious industry, he was able—as his pen ran— to set forth, beyond any

other of the playwrights but Shakspere, the character of a gentleman. Some of Heywood's gentlemen might have been ancestors of Colonel Newcome. Carelessly popular he was, spontaneous, veracious, and at heart gentle.

We have now glanced at the four Elizabethans, besides Shakspere, whom Webster cited as his masters in 1612. On the whole, to speak paradoxically, the most marked trait which they possess in common is their diversity. The earlier group of Elizabethan playwrights makes a different impression from this; Greene and Peele and Kyd and Marlowe and John Lily, whatever their divergences, one remembers together, as one remembers the makers of Elizabethan lyrics; all together were breaking from the bonds of old conventions. This subsequent group—Chapman and Jonson and Dekker and Heywood—began their work in days when enfranchisement was won. And enfranchisement means disintegration. By 1612, we can perceive, the drama was already disintegrant. The story to come is a story of decline.

III

THE DECLINE OF THE DRAMA.

In 1600, we found, Elizabethan literature indicated, above all else, integrity of national temper. Throughout it seemed animated by a common spirit of buoyant experiment—spontaneous, enthusiastic, and versatile; and this had resulted in admirable poetry, lyric and dramatic. Such a condition can never be stationary. Within twelve years, we have already seen, the drama had conspicuously changed. We have traced the career of Shakspere to its close; and, taking for our guide the preface to Webster's "White Devil," which in 1612 mentioned as models, by whose light he would be read, certain other dramatists then eminent, we have considered such as these as had begun their career before the seventeenth century opened: Chapman, Jonson, Dekker, and Heywood. These men we found to indicate how by 1612 the elder spirit was already disintegrating. Each of them, in his own way, though with much of the old spontaneity and vigor, had developed a style, a manner—a limit, if you will—obviously his own. Before touching on Beaumont and Fletcher, the remaining masters in Webster's

list, we may glance, I think, at two other dramatists whom he might well have included with them, among those by whose light we should read him.

One is Marston, who began his work by some conventional satires, and then turned himself to the stage. His plays are careless, and—at least to me—repellently disagreeable. They deserve this passing mention only because, at just about the time when Shakspere turned himself from the perfection of comedy to the perfecting of tragedy, they testify at once to the fact that tragedy became temporarily popular, and to what a detestable thing vulgar treatment of tragedy can be.

The other contemporary whom Webster neglected was of far higher power. Middleton, to be sure, has not retained even such popularity as still makes faintly familiar the names we have already mentioned. One can easily see why. Of all the old dramatists, his natural temper seems the coldest, the least sympathetic; and although he could bend language to his meaning with the best, he lacked lyric power. On the other hand, there are moments when one feels Middleton's mastery of situation and of character superior to all but Shakspere's own.

He was apt to work in collaboration, to be sure, particularly with Dekker, and with one or both of those rather indistinct Rowleys, whose office as dramatists seems to have been to emphasize the merits of other men by interweaving with these merits their

own manifold faults. This fact of collaboration may have been one reason why Middleton failed particularly to attract Webster's attention; another reason may be found in the probability that his most powerful plays were made later than 1612. But he certainly began writing before 1600; and with equal certainty he wrote memorably.

Broadly speaking, his work falls into two familiar groups — comedies and tragedies. The comedies, which were probably the earlier, are cleverly constructed, remarkably easy in style and plausible in effect, firm but oddly unsympathetic in character, and —beyond anything on which we have touched as yet —deliberately indecent. None of the old dramatists is conspicuous for purity; Shakspere himself, far and away the cleanest of them, permitted himself plenty of passages which nobody could publish nowadays. In the work of Shakspere and of the other earlier men, the while, lubricity seems incidental, unthinking, and so not unwholesome. In Middleton, on the other hand, it seems essential, deliberate, corrupt.

Accordingly, when one turns to his tragedies one is hardly surprised to find another phase of corruption, of palpable decadence. Particularly in "Women Beware Women" and in the "Changeling," Middleton's portrayal of character seems second only to that of Shakspere. The difference appears, however, when we feel that strange, insidious heartlessness which prevents him, despite his insight, from sympathizing with

the personages whom he creates. It appears more saliently still when we grow aware that the only sort of character which seems to interest Middleton is evil. With all Heywood's right happy copiousness, we found, he could carelessly tell us how the spirit of a gentleman stays changeless through the ages. What Middleton, with all his cool deliberation, could best set forth is how a woman can lapse from girlhood to harlotry. In tragedy as in comedy, he shows us the depths of life—not the heights. In both, too, he lacks the touch of lyric spontaneity which pervaded the happy copiousness of the men who were writing around him. And thus, standing apart from the rest, just as each of the rest stands apart from the others, he stands apart from all on whom we have as yet touched. For his is the first great figure to signalize not only the disintegration of the drama but also its imminent decadence.

Decadence, beyond question, appears throughout the intermingled work of the last two masters whom Webster mentions among those by whose light he wishes what he writes may be read. "The no less worthy composures of the both worthily excellent Master Beaumont and Master Fletcher" is his phrase for them; in which words it is hardly fantastic to discern allusion to their gentleness of birth. Fletcher's father, a clergyman who in Elizabeth's time attended Mary Stuart to the scaffold, died Bishop of London; and Beaumont's, a country gentleman by origin, rose

to be a judge and a knight. Among the old dramatists no others are known to have lived so little

> lost in mists and fogs of people
> Noteless and out of name.

The mere accident of rank, however, could never have given them, together or apart, their reputation and influence. More than twenty years after Fletcher died, and more than thirty after the death of Beaumont, Shirley, in his introduction to the first folio of their plays, could write of the book as "without flattery, the greatest monument of the scene that time and humanity have produced," and therefore as bound to "live, not only the crown and sole reputation of our own, but the stain of all other nations and languages." From the time, not yet definitely known, when they began to write until the closing of the theatres—and, indeed, for some years after the theatres were reopened, at the Restoration—their plays seem to have been decidedly the most popular in the language. No one else could draw such houses.

Modern criticism has attempted, with some plausibility, to distinguish between them. In "Philaster," for example, there is a passage concerning death which may probably be attributed to Beaumont:

> 'Tis less than to be born; a lasting sleep;
> A quiet resting from all jealousy,
> A thing we all pursue; I know, besides,
> It is but giving over of a game
> That must be lost.

Compare this with a similar passage in "Thierry and Theodoret," which is almost certainly by Fletcher:

> 'Tis of all sleeps the sweetest.
> Children begin it to us, strong men seek it,
> And kings from height of all their painted glory
> Fall like spent exhalations to this centre;
> And those are fools that fear it, or imagine
> A few unhandsome pleasures or life's profits
> Can recompense this peace; and mad that stay it
> Till age blow out their lights, or rotten vapours
> Bring them dispersed to the earth. . . .

You can hardly help feeling a difference between these two passages, not only in formal style but in temperamental mood; the first is in every sense the finer; the latter is at once the more elaborately rhetorical, the more palpably sentimental, and somewhat the sweeter. At the same time, you can hardly help feeling that the passages have in common something deeper than their differences. Both have a touch of insidious, charming sentimentality. In both, the verse, with an almost cloying sweetness, has lost that note of aspiring grandeur which never forsook "Marlowe's mighty line." Yet both are instantly intelligible and lingeringly delightful. We shall make no error if for a moment we neglect the moderns, and follow Webster and Shirley and the rest, grouping Beaumont and Fletcher together.

The secret of their popularity is not hard to find. Beyond any of the men we have considered before—

beyond any, I think, who wrote before them—they were, first and always, men with a cultivated instinct for stage effect. More sophisticated than their predecessors, and so more skilful, they were never hampered by any suspicion of ulterior purpose. They were thorough masters of the theatre, and they rested content with that. They had discovered what they could do; they did it again and again, seeking freshness of effect, not like the elder men in experiment, but in pretty and subtle variations on familiar themes. Brilliant they surely were; sympathetic, too, both with the surface of their characters and still more with their audiences; admirable craftsmen in a theatrical way, and accomplished poets; gentlemen, as well, after the fashion of their time; but never troubled—and so never troublesome—with any deep sense that life has significance. Their dramatic sense meanwhile was so strong that their plays, occasionally revived in private experiment, still hold the attention of an audience more readily than Shakspere's own. So they poured out play after play—comedies, melodramas, tragedies, burlesques, pastorals, masques—with no hampering conscience, but with keen relish for all manner of emotion, whether this sprang from frank sensuality and gross sensationalism or from the exquisite cadences of lyric poetry. Beyond the rest, they indicate a Renaissance past the zenith of its strength, but not of its splendor. With them we are in that fascinating period of nascent decadence which foretells the end of any

school of art; rejoicing in life with such full consciousness of delight as could not come before and yet is destined swiftly to become dulled and jaded.

So no wonder they took the stage by storm, and held it long. The wonder rather is that, for the last two hundred years, their plays have been so little acted. Yet, as one ponders over their pages, the wonder fades. These pages are full of beauties; except Shakspere, none of their fellow-dramatists has left us half so rich a treasury of beautiful phrases. In no other, for example, would you easily find lines so instantly appealing as the first of theirs which come to my mind as I write—the prayer of Caratach before the battle in "Bonduca":

> Give us this day good hearts, good enemies,
> Good blows o' both sides, wounds that fear or flight
> Can claim no share in.

And the other fragments I have quoted already are but examples of thousands. Yet these, as one reads, prove not only—like the prayer in Sidney's "Arcadia"—mere miracles of masterly rhetoric. They prove, too, imbedded—to quote one of themselves—in

> such qualities, and such wild flings,
> Such admirable imperfections,

that nowadays many good folks might well be loath to own their makers for brethren.

A phase of their decadence, by the way, I have

unintentionally illustrated in that last sentence. Their verse is wonderfully easy and sweet and spontaneous; yet it is so near the rhythm of prose that you can often imbed it in a modern sentence where it will instantly sink beneath reach of the ear. Hardly an imperfection that, to be sure; or at least not of a kind instantly to indicate why they are neglected to-day. An incident which lately occurred will tell that story. A few months ago a friend of mine, who had long and deeply delighted in their poetry, was asked to prepare for popular reading two or three plays of theirs, which he was left free to select. The man in question has never impressed me as a prig; yet after some weeks of hesitation, he declined the task because, after scrutiny, he could find none of their plays which he was willing to lay before the general public with the sanction of his name. One and all of the comedies were too corrupt, too indecent. They had a charm, to be sure, which raised them above the cold obscenities of Middleton, and which wakened into romantic or sentimental life such humors as in the labored and understanding comedies of Jonson seem almost monstrous. But, for all that, they were as lewd as the feebler, and therefore baser, comedies of the Restoration. Yet, if you attempted to expurgate them, you altered them beyond recognition. And the case with the other than comic plays of Beaumont and Fletcher proved little better: the "Maid's Tragedy" dwells on hideously cynical seduction; the "King

and No King," on incest; "Valentinian," on rape. Everywhere you find poetic beauties; everywhere these grow luxuriantly from a festering corruption beneath. There is hardly one of their more than fifty plays which could be presented to-day without such expurgation as should leave it no longer itself. And so, perhaps, our English stage is not altogether the poorer for having lost them.

In their own day, to be sure, the stage was the richer for them. Their beauties are as much their own as their vices, and were equally welcome to their public. The likeness of their work to the romances of Shakspere—in subject, in structure, in peculiarities of verse—has often been remarked; and they have consequently been supposed to have begun by skilful superficial imitation of his spiritually ripest phase. The question is one of chronology, not yet fixed in detail; but, as I have told you already, the studies of my friend, Professor Thorndike, have virtually proved that several of their plays must have been in existence decidedly before the dates commonly assigned to "Cymbeline," the "Tempest," or the "Winter's Tale." If he is right—and I believe him so—the relation commonly thought to have existed between them and Shakspere is precisely reversed. Shakspere was the imitator, not they; indeed, as we have seen, he was from the beginning an imitator, not an inventor. And here his imitations are not in all respects better than his models. The comparative super-

ficiality of Beaumont and Fletcher made them easy to understand, and by this time Shakspere was too pregnant a poet to be instantly comprehensible. Their insidious corruption of temper, too, made them pepper the higher, and so the surer to please. Shakspere's qualities were far greater and deeper than theirs, but theirs were more popular, more amusing than his. Audiences would probably have preferred them. In which fact we may find, if we choose, a reason why, after a little friendly collaboration with Fletcher, Shakspere may have withdrawn from a professional career in which these younger men proved able to attract the public more than he could.

Beaumont died in the same year with Shakspere; Fletcher survived until 1625—his later plays slightly exaggerating the decadent traits evident in those which Beaumont and he had written together. The change may have been due to comparative weakness in Fletcher, or perhaps to the hastening decadence of his time, or to the mere weight of accumulating years. The noteworthy fact about these last of the men whom Webster mentioned as his masters is that, unlike most of their forerunners, they began their work better than they ended it. Marlowe's best plays are his latest. Even Shakspere's romances hold their own. With Beaumont and Fletcher, one feels not a growth in power, but rather a slow, gentle decline.

We must hasten on to Webster. We have now glanced at all the playwrights by whose light he de-

sired to be read—at Marston, too, and Middleton, and the Rowleys. There is only one other earlier name, I think, which he might have mentioned—that of Cyril Tourneur, whose reckless tragedies, coming between Marston's and Webster's—less monstrously crude than the former, incalculably less profound than the latter—have lately appealed to the kind of taste which likes to be called decadent. Webster himself is made of more substantial stuff. In power, I incline to believe, he rises above all the other playwrights except Marlowe and Shakspere.

But human power has its historical stages. There are moments when, like Marlowe's and that of the lyric poets before and around him, it exerts itself in breaking old bonds; there are moments when, for a little while—as with Shakspere, and some of the lesser men at whom we have glanced—it seems free; but there must swiftly come later moments when self-consciousness begins to be inhibitory, when every effort seems to be a conscious one to struggle against the tightening force of new bonds. Webster's power always seems thus inhibited. His work is a wonderful example of how, in any school of art, a crushing sense of fact is sure fatally to overpower the surgent imagination which has lately awakened that art from lethargy to life.

So far as personal record goes, Webster's history is shadowy; and among the few plays he has left us, two will serve our purpose—the colossal sketch he

called the "White Devil," and the later, far more finished, "Duchess of Malfi." At first sight, both seem almost crabbedly obscure; on fresh readings both reveal more and more beauties. But, no matter how well you know them, neither ever approaches the lucidity of Marlowe or of Shakspere; and this, chiefly, I think, because throughout them both every touch seems to have demanded conscious, deliberate effort. The stories of both are Italian. The former is essentially historical; Vittoria Accoramboni was alive thirty years before this dramatic account of her career was printed. The "Duchess of Malfi" comes from an older story, which found its way into Paynter's "Palace of Pleasure"; in atmosphere and treatment, however, the play, though by far the more elaborately developed, resembles the other so closely that we may fairly consider them together, choosing our characteristic examples of Webster from either.

The first thing which reveals his inhibitory sense of fact is the amazing truth to actual life of his Italy. This is not a matter of historical detail. Webster makes as free with names and dates and recorded circumstances as any of his fellows made. But compare the Italy of Webster's "White Devil" with the France of Chapman's "Bussy d'Ambois"—also less than thirty years past when the play about it was written. Chapman's France is an impalpable nowhere, peopled with stalking utterers of his full and heightened style; Webster's Italy, beside it, seems as accu-

rately local as that of Stendhal. Again, compare this Italy of Webster's with that of Middleton, who—perhaps a little later—turned the story of Bianca Capello into "Women Beware Women." For all Middleton's realism, his Florence is still a region not quite of fact, but of imagination too; a place to which one might have journeyed from Romeo's Verona or from Othello's Venice. By its side, Webster's Italy again reminds one of Stendhal's. Though it be fiction, it has a value almost documentary.

Now this Medicean Italy which he so faithfully tried to set forth was perhaps the most complex as well as the most corrupt region known to modern history. Intrigue within intrigue really marked it as the land which bred Machiavelli and thus gave our language an adjective to enshrine the memory of him. A sense of this complexity seems to have weighed down on Webster until it became benumbing; he always seems aware of how very much he has to tell, afraid lest he shall lose some thread of his labyrinthine argument, lest he shall unduly simplify deeds and characters which simplicity would belie. He never approaches unconscious ease; he never relaxes into sympathetic humor; there are no Nurses in his Italian world, or Mercutios. There are wonderful villains, though, and tenderly pathetic victims. The evil of life and the suffering—the horror and the sadness—he sets forth wonderfully. His work is full of isolated situations, and phrases, and touches of

character and of aphorism, which seem almost ultimate in their combined power and truth to life. What makes the total effect of them bewildering is that he could never quite fuse them into organic unity. Again and again, he throws upon his readers the task of composing, if so they may, his marvellous fragments of tragedy. They are like some unfinished mosaic, needing a flash of electric fire to melt their outlines into the intelligible unity of painting.

Again, in a very different way, you may feel Webster's inhibitory sense of fact in obviously imitative passages, such as his modest preface to the "White Devil" calls instant attention to. You will remember, for example, how the dying Desdemona flickers into an instant of revived life, when those about her already think the end come:

Emilia.

Cassio, my lord, hath kill'd a young Venetian,
Call'd Roderigo.

Othello.

Roderigo kill'd!
And Cassio kill'd!

Emilia.

No, Cassio is not kill'd.

Othello.

Not Cassio kill'd! then murder's out of tune,
And sweet revenge grows harsh.

Desdemona.

O, falsely, falsely murder'd!

Emilia.

Alas, what cry is that?

Othello.

That! what?

Emilia.

Out, and alas! that was my lady's voice.
Help! help, ho! O lady, speak again!
Sweet Desdemona! O sweet mistress, speak!

Desdemona.

A guiltless death I die.

Emilia.

O, who hath done this deed?

Desdemona.

Nobody; I myself. Farewell:
Commend me to my kind lord: O, farewell! [*Dies.*]

Othello.

Why, how should she be murdered? etc.

Compare with this the death scene of the strangled Duchess of Malfi. Bosola, at whose bidding the murder has been done, is left alone with her body; and here is what ensues:

Bosola.

What would I do, were this to do again?
I would not change my peace of conscience
For all the wealth of Europe. She stirs; here's life:
Return, fair soul from darkness, and lead mine
Out of this nimble hell: she's warm, she breathes:
Upon thy pale lips I will melt my heart,
To store them with fresh colour. Who's there?
Some cordial drink! Alas! I dare not call:
So pity would destroy pity. Her eye opes,
And heaven in it seems to ope, that late was shut,
To take me up to mercy.

Duchess.

Antonio!

Bosola.

Yes, madam, he is living;
The dead bodies you saw were but figur'd statues.
He's reconciled to your brother; the Pope hath wrought
The atonement.

Duchess.

Mercy! [*Dies.*]

Bosola.

O, she's gone again! there the cords of life broke, etc.

The likeness is too close to be accidental. Webster tried to outdo one of Shakspere's most daring stage effects, and nearly overstepped the line which divides the sublime from the ridiculous.

But his imitations are sometimes more impressive. In Ben Jonson's "Cynthia's Revels," for example, there is a prettily fantastic scene in which Mercury awakens Echo, whose responses to his questions—repeating their final syllables—make very pretty plays on words. In the "Duchess of Malfi" this stage effect is deliberately reproduced, but in a mood of fantastic horror which makes Webster's Echo—no longer embodied but literal—faintly foreshadow the fantasy of Poe's "Raven." Again, the way in which Webster exhausts the resources of combined grotesqueness and horror which reside in the old stage convention of madness, is reminiscent not only of Kyd and of Middleton, but of Shakspere himself once more. When you compare the "Duchess of Malfi" with Kyd's "Spanish Tragedy" or with Middleton's "Change-

ling," it seems a work of genius. When you compare it with "Hamlet" or "Lear," you feel how that genius was subdued by its sense of the greater genius in whose light it prayed to be read.

In Webster's very style, too, a similar inhibitory sense of his task appears. Undoubtedly he had extraordinary narrative power; but none of his narrative passages quite fit their context—as Menenius Agrippa's fable of the Belly does, for example, in "Coriolanus." Webster had rare power of aphorism, too, but his aphorisms seem more like those of a formal book of proverbs than like the consecutive utterances of human beings. He had, as well, an unusual faculty for illustrative comparisons drawn straight from Nature; yet these, too, stand by themselves. They are as far from the exuberant ingenuity of Lily as they are from the calm finality of Dante.

And when we come to the form of his verse, we find this broken beyond all precedent before. You will have felt this in the contrast between the rhythm of "Othello" and that of the "Duchess of Malfi." But go a little further; take two of Marlowe's more familiar lines:

> O thou art fairer than the evening air,
> Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars!

Here you have the blank-verse of our drama in its first freshness. Take the first phrase which comes to mind from Shakspere's maturity:

She looks like sleep,
As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.

Here you have dramatic blank-verse at its acme. Now compare with these Webster's most familiar line—that which Ferdinand utters as he looks down at the sister he has had murdered:

Cover her face. Mine eyes dazzle. She died young.

That line is marvellous in its truth—its insight. But every quiver of the old music is silent, which once held verse above the level of life. The rhythm is that of a poet who cannot escape consciousness that his personages are human beings, who should speak in the language not of convention but of mankind. One may almost say that Webster's style seems instantly poetical only in his infrequent lyric passages: the so-called "Land Dirge," for example:

Call for the robin redbreast and the wren,
Since o'er shady graves they hover,
And with leaves and flowers do cover
The friendless bodies of unburied men.
Call unto his funeral dole
The ant, the field-mouse, and the mole,
To rear him hillocks that shall keep him warm,
And (when gay tombs are robb'd) sustain no harm.
But keep the wolf far thence, that's foe to men,
For with his nails he'll dig them up again.

Whatever they lost, the old playwrights, to the end, could still be lyric when they would.

So Webster, too, proves more tragic in a way, than the laborious and wonderful tragedies which, amid all his inhibitory consciousness of fact, his power of imagination was still able to block out. For the limits which were so fast closing about him were such as we can now see, in the perspective of three hundred years, to have meant that not only he, but all who followed him, could never do more in their own art than follow the masters by whose light they would be sympathetically read. Marlowe began English tragedy, we may say. Kyd and Marston carelessly developed it. Shakspere brought it to its acme. Tourneur showed the beginning of its wildly rapid decline. In Webster one feels its expiring and despairing effort. So an end.

There were later men, of course; it is said that the "Duchess of Malfi" was acted in 1616—the year when Shakspere died, when Beaumont died, and when Ben Jonson published the first folio volume of his works. Jonson himself wrote on; so did Heywood, and Middleton, and Fletcher, and more. But there was no new note in any of their work; and there was little new in the work of the three still-remembered dramatists whose whole production virtually belongs to this later period. These are Ford, Massinger, and Shirley.

They were the decadent masters of a great school of art, we must remember; they retained, as such men always must retain, trace after trace of its greatness. You can find such qualities throughout the history

of expression. If every vestige of the Parthenon frieze had crumbled away, we might still feel something of the splendor of Greek sculpture from such remnants of it as those triumphal figures bearing the spoils of Jerusalem through the Arch of Titus. Like the Roman sculptors, too, and their own English predecessors, the latest dramatists followed the old methods to the end. To the end, accordingly, these old dramatists were not, like modern artists, creators, but rather they were frankly translators and adapters. A single passage from Ford may perhaps serve accordingly to define his place for us. In the last scene of "Love's Sacrifice" he combines the catastrophes of "Much Ado About Nothing," "Romeo and Juliet," and "Othello." And here are some of the lines in which Fernando—for the instant reproducing Romeo—rants out how he feels his poison work:

> It works, it works already, bravely! bravely!
> Now, now I feel it tear each several joint.
> O royal poison! trusty friend! split, split
> Both heart and gall asunder, excellent bane!

In this laborious iteration, anyone can instantly feel the touch of exhaustion. This is not the old mastery; it is a feeble imitation of accepted conventions, falling into palpably overwrought rhetorical device. And mention together the name of this play—"Love's Sacrifice"—and the names of those which it mimics—"Much Ado About Nothing" and "Romeo and Juliet"

and "Othello." Shakspere, no doubt, imitated, too; but the master altered Lily, and whomsoever else he imitated, for the better, lifting mortality into immortality; Ford, the follower, gently lulled the master to mortal sleep. Not that Ford was a weakling; only, where Webster's power struggled, with some trace of the old titanic strength, against the new traditions, Ford was of such later time as must perforce submit. You will remember those passionate lines about beauty in Marlowe's "Tamburlaine." Put beside them Ford's most surely lasting words, similar in purpose:

> Can you paint a thought? or number
> Every fancy in a slumber?
> Can you count soft minutes roving
> From a dial's point by moving?
> Can you grasp a sigh? or lastly
> Rob a virgin's honour chastely?
>
> No, O, no! yet you may
> Sooner do both that and this,
> This and that, and never miss,
> That by any praise display
> Beauty's beauty . . .

The contrast shadows the whole story—told again, if you will, in a comparison of how chronicle-history awoke in Marlowe's "Edward II.," and lived in "Henry IV.," and sank to sleep again in Ford's "Perkin Warbeck."

There is far more in Ford than this, else he would have been utterly forgotten. But this—his historical

position—is what concerns us now. So there is far more in Massinger than his moralizing, painstaking rhetoric—the very laborious evenness of which stands in such sharp contrast to the excellent flashes of poetry sure to vivify the careless conventions and the cloudy rant of the true Elizabethans. One of his plays has chanced feebly to survive on the stage. With the exception of Shakspere, the "New Way to Pay Old Debts" is the only relic of the Elizabethan drama which I ever remember on the bills. In some degree, of course, this is because the part of Sir Giles Overreach gives such an admirable opportunity to a skilful "star." Still more, I think, it is because the play itself happens to retain so many traces of the stronger stuff on which its lighter structure is built. It is adapted from Middleton's "Trick to Catch the Old One," a play replete with careless, indecent life; and it tells its expurgated story with much vestige of the humors which Ben Jonson's understanding labors introduced on our stage and which Beaumont and Fletcher romanticized. Yet compared with work by Beaumont and Fletcher, by Jonson, or by Middleton, it seems throughout not spontaneous or vital, but only conscientiously rhetorical. And as for Massinger's verse, here is how Sir Giles commends a suitor to his daughter:

> 'Tis an honorable man;
> A lord, Meg, and commands a regiment
> Of soldiers, and what's rare, is one himself,

A bold and understanding one: and to be
A lord, and a good leader, in one volume
Is granted unto few but such as rise up
The kingdom's glory.

Superb rhetoric still, but no more like our older dramatic poetry than I to Hercules.

The last of the old dramatists was James Shirley. Like all the rest, he was born under Queen Elizabeth. Of all he was the only one to survive until the Restoration; by a fitting chance, his end came from exposure during that London fire which, when he was seventy years old, swept out of existence the city for whose denizens the playwrights had made delight. This last of them died with Gothic St. Paul's, and the Elizabethan capital which had festered about it. And as to Shirley's work, I know of nothing more significant than what James Russell Lowell somewhere tells. He loved our old dramatic poets, and read them deeply. One day his eye lighted on a set of Shirley, which had long been on his shelves. He could not recall that he had ever read a line of it. He took a volume down, prepared for a new pleasure; and there, on page after page, he found what he later found in the other volumes, too—pencilled notes in his own handwriting. Years before he had annotated the whole set, and in them all he had found nothing to abide in that wonderful literary memory of his, who more than any other American of his time searched all things, and held fast that which is good. Shirley wrote copiously, in al-

most every manner practised by the Elizabethan playwrights; he did nothing very ill; but he did nothing so well as to stamp on it any individuality of his own. He is a fact, accordingly, not in literature, but in literary history—marking, as none had marked before him, how completely the life was gone from that complete school of literature which, in 1600, had seemed inexhaustibly vital.

When the Puritan Gosson, in 1579, published his "School of Abuse," attacking all fine art, there was no real need of Sidney's "Defence of Poesie" to sustain the superb Elizabethan integrity which was so soon to raise the English stage above all others but the Greek. When Shakspere, in 1600, published—or more probably saw published by piratical booksellers—more of his plays than in any year before, this integrity of national expression seemed still unbroken. When, in 1633, the Puritan Prynne made his more famous attack — "Histriomastix" — the giants were dead or dying, each by himself; and the stage had truly sunk into a deadness which makes the closing of the theatres, nine years later, seem like the sealing of some noisome tomb.

It is needless to dwell longer on this phase or that of the swift decline; on the increasing monstrosity of tragic motives, or the constantly more conscious obscenities of comedy; on the exhaustion which led to all manner of excess; on the way in which humorous exaggeration suppressed truth of character and blind-

ed insight; on the benumbing consciousness of the new traditions which finally made the romantic drama as servile to convention as ever was the pseudo-classic; on the sinking of blank-verse into a rhetoric which no ear can distinguish from prose. The story which all these symptoms tell is the same. In 1600, English audiences were national; the scenes and the words which appealed to them expressed the integral spirit of the pristine Elizabethan world. In 1642, English audiences were only a class by themselves—fastidiously cultivated, perhaps, both in the graces and in the vices of acknowledged fashion, but with hardly a trace left of that eager strenuousness which had animated the robust integrity of the elder time.

It is needless, either, to dwell on the forms of drama which retained most life—the most elaborately artificial, the Masques which afforded the court such delight as later times have specialized into the opera and the ballet; or on the one spark of lasting vitality which survived. For even Shirley had lyric power still. Witness such a stanza as this:

> The glories of our blood and state
> Are shadows, not substantial things;
> There is no armour against fate;
> Death lays his icy hand on kings:
> Sceptre and crown
> Must tumble down,
> And in the dust be equal made
> With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

For us it is enough, just now, to recall that when we tried to symbolize the mood of Elizabethan literature, we fell to remembering the Pillars of Hercules, and how the old voyagers passed together through these limits, eager to explore the unknown seas beyond. If we recur to that image, and fancy ourselves to have been of the fleet, voyaging in that bark which was laden with the riches of the drama, we may fancy, as we remember the course of it, which we have so hastily traced, that some current swept us uncontrollably away from all our convoy. And so at last—with a swiftness which should make us reel—our first tragic discovery is the sinking beneath our feet of the craft

> Which once we deemed the vessel of our hopes
> Upon the seas of the future.

IV

THE DIVERGENT MASTERS OF LYRIC POETRY

We have tried to render ourselves some broad account of how integrally the spontaneous, enthusiastic, and versatile national temper of England displayed itself in literature when the seventeenth century began. And in tracing the course of the drama from its luxuriant life in 1600 to its extinction at the close of the theatres in 1642, we have seen how the most admirable phase of that integral Elizabethan literature disintegrated and declined. Our next effort will be to follow the course of other English poetry the while.

Instead of other poetry I had almost said lyric. The very hesitation which made me substitute that colorless little word deserves a moment's attention. In such considerations as ours, we are forced to simplify fact; if, in contemplating any aspect of our subject, we can clearly discern some characteristic feature by which it may surely be distinguished from its surroundings, we must rest for the moment content. Thus, in touching on one or another of the great men who composed that great school of drama from which Shakspere sprung—great the least of them, however

far he may have lingered below the standard of the greatest,—we did not scruple to neglect innumerable features of him. All we attempted was to perceive his relation, on the whole, to his fellows. And something like this is all we can attempt now, when we turn to the makers of those other, less instantly popular phases of poetry which equally altered with the century we are contemplating together. So, far as I should have been from comprehensively right, I should not have been all wrong if I had said at once that we were now to deal with lyric poetry, as distinguished from dramatic. For very surely, whatever form, other than dramatic, English poetry took during the last years of the sixteenth century and during the half-century which followed, the grace which has kept it alive is its lyric quality. Epic in purpose, one poet may have been, no doubt; another, didactic; a third, satirical; but whoever among them is remembered or read to-day is remembered, not for these several purposes, but for the lyric beauties which grew first with something like the natural luxuriance of wild flowers, and later with a luxuriance more like that which delights us in lovingly tended gardens.

If I were asked, indeed, to cite verses which my memory has unconsciously selected as typical of English poetry about 1600, I should hardly hesitate to repeat a little song from Campion's "Book of Airs" which has lingered with me hauntingly ever since I first read it:

When thou must home to shades of underground,
And there arrived, a new admired guest
The beauteous spirits do engirt thee round,
White Iope, blithe Helen, and the rest,
To hear the stories of thy finished love,
From that smooth tongue whose music hell can move;

Then wilt thou speak of banqueting delights,
Of masques and revels which sweet youth did make,
Of tourneys and great challenges of knights,
And all those triumphs for thy beauty's sake:
When thou hast told these honors done to thee,
Then tell, O tell, how thou didst murder me.

Though this lack the enthusiastic spontaneity—the full experimental youthfulness—of those elder lyrics which we hastily summarized when we touched on the first outburst of Elizabethan song, it has at once the felicity of a momentary mastery still unfettered by consciousness of limitation, and a wonderful lyric purity. Campion was as much a musician as a poet, but he lived and wrote his airs at a time when his art of music was so far from its later, overweening development that whoever made words for singing made the words themselves sing.

All the while I should have known that this was far from the whole story, just as I knew how much we neglected when we first tried to summarize our impression of Elizabethan poetry. The chief feature of this poetry still seems to me its buoyant integrity of enthusiastic experiment. First struggling with the

difficulties of a language not yet tamed to the service of fine art, then swiftly finding themselves masters of it, the poets—I had almost said the Englishmen—who breathed the air of the spacious elder days surged with the dramatists through the straits which had fixed the limits of the old world, daringly and joyously ready to explore the mysteries beyond. But already, when the seventeenth century began, there were many signs which told how the little fleet must scatter—tokens of the disintegration to come.

On Spenser, in his lofty isolation from the rest, we dwelt a little at first; and our purpose then was such that we were warranted in thinking of him almost as if he had been solitary. But this was no more the case with him than with Shakspere. The first three books of the "Faerie Queene" were published in 1590. Before Spenser's death, nine years later, various other men had published poems which began to indicate divergent tendencies, each of which might well deserve careful study. Daniel, and a very little later Drayton, had begun their copious careers. They had not only added their parts to the growing list of sonnet-sequences which was so swiftly developing the excellent experiments of Sidney into the permanence of Shakspere; they had also produced their first examples of that patriotic narrative poetry which—although it contained the germs of greatness—never quite reached the height of true epic nor yet such development as that of its dramatic brother, the chronicle-history.

Yet, in Drayton's hands, it later achieved one masterpiece. There is hardly anything in our language to surpass his stirring "Ballad of Agincourt," which begins:

Fair stood the wind for France,
When we our sails advance,
Nor now to prove our chance
Longer will tarry;
But putting to the main,
At Caux, the mouth of Seine,
With all his martial train,
Landed King Harry.

Campbell tried that kind of thing, and so did Tennyson; both admirably. But read their verses by the side of Drayton's—himself a man of less gift than either—and you will know, even though you cannot tell, how none but Elizabethans could quite match the quality of the elder note.

Southwell, meantime, hanged for a Jesuit at Tyburn, had left us his little treasury of mystic fantasies, preserving record of the gentle and adoring ecstasies which inspired and consoled through persecution the spirit of English Catholicism. Beautiful purity of heart they bespeak; Southwell was one who need never have feared but he should see God. Yet there are moods in which one questions whether this quality is, in truth, his most noteworthy; for the images in which he clothes his ingenuous purity seem now and again, for all their sweetness, somewhat trivial in their con-

scious ingenuity. Such conscious ingenuity, without the balance of fervor and of ecstasy, pervades the unmitigated fantasies of Sir John Davies—with his "Orchestra," his "Nosce Teipsum," and his "Hymns of Astræa." These last are perhaps most typical. All are anagrams. The initial letters of the sixteen lines composing everyone spell the royal name ELIZABETHA REGINA. Yet the cramping necessity of beginning lines with the letters B E T H A did not prevent Davies from making stanzas so freely lyric as this:

> But, Nightingale, sith you delight
> Ever to watch the starry night;
> Tell all the stars of heaven,
> Heaven never had a star so bright
> As now to earth is given;

namely, her maiden majesty, then sixty-six years of age.

At about the same time the satires of Hall and of Marston—far from immortal, to be sure—carried perceptibly forward a kind of poetry which has always seemed exotic in our language, because its real effort is to express the facts of modern experience in the terms of decadent Rome. And in the same years the full and heightened style of Chapman had begun to enrich English with that version of Homer which remains precious. Not the least wonder of the lines in which Keats recorded his first knowledge of it is the precision with which they express the spirit,

not of Greece, but of the closing sixteenth century when Elizabeth reigned, and Chapman wrote, and there were still worlds to conquer:

> Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken;
> Or like stout Cortez, when, with eagle eyes,
> He stared at the Pacific; and all his men
> Looked at each other with a wild surmise,
> Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

When Spenser first sent forth the "Faerie Queene," not one of these contemporary poets had begun to publish. When he died, in 1599, there were other names, too, lesser than his but still distinct. We have touched on Daniel and Drayton, on Southwell and Davies, on Hall and Marston, on Chapman, only to remind ourselves of a truth which, when we first generalized our impression of Elizabethan poetry, was not quite so salient but that we might neglect it. That poetry was truly integral in all its spontaneous and versatile experimental enthusiasm. At the same time, each new poet was beginning to grow more individual, more distinctly separate from the rest. As you know them better, you begin to feel how swiftly the time was approaching when each man should have his own office. And thus considering and comparing them, you grow in the first place to feel more and more assured that, apart from the dramatists, Spenser alone attained lasting eminence; but that meanwhile two

slightly later men were emerging with more distinctness than the rest. One of these is Ben Jonson—more nearly excellent as a poet than he was as a dramatist; the other, who wrote his poems at this time, though few seem to have been published till much later, is Donne. Before proceeding to what followed, we may best pause to consider these three dissimilar masters.

In 1600, of course, Spenser was lately dead. Yet that very word seems inapt; for Spenser, the poet, is of those few who will never die. He had crowned the experiments of his early days with an achievement in its own way unsurpassed. No doubt his stanza is of foreign origin, suggested by his delight in the poetry of Renascent Italy; but there can be no doubt, either, that in adapting this to English use he made it idiomatic. Spenser's verse, too, is idiomatic in spite of those deliberate, experimental archaisms and oddities of language which make his dialect unlike anything ever actually spoken. He had made this English, at last, an immortal instrument of beauty. On this aspect of his career we dwelt perhaps distractingly when we considered his relation to his predecessors.

Yet mere form never made poetry live. Obscure, or at least bewildering, though Spenser be, when we strive to find our way through the fantasies he made alive with beauty, there can be no question that these very fantasies reveal a personality in the poet. Such

impressions as those on which our conception of his personality are based are elusively hard to summarize; yet we must attempt some summary of them if we would definitely account for that lasting influence which began in Spenser's own time and has never quite lapsed. What makes him still the Poet's Poet is not only his beauty; it is partly the character which this beauty embodies. Gentle of heart he was; courteous; at once sensuous and unfleshly; and sincere in his purpose to make his utterances edifying. With this temper he faced the facts of his Elizabethan world. The deeds of men, in their actuality, were often base and ugly; the art of literature, which he was destined to master, was still in the making; and everywhere about him, in those days of enthusiastic experiment, affectation and merit were bewilderingly confused. As comments on life, accordingly, his poems are archaically, deliberately, almost painfully artificial; his substance, whatever its ultimate veracity, is never simple, never spontaneous or inevitable in conception. Yet, beneath it all, you feel the spirit of one who would work for righteousness; who feels, with a gentleness all his own, that each man should strive in this world to make his life better, and more holy. Now this spirit, despite the sensuous beauty of its guise, is at heart that of the same English Reformation from which later sprang the nobler features of dominant Puritanism. Those are not all mistaken who find in Spenser deeper and deeper trace of what was deepest

in the spiritual life of his time. Puritan or not, it was with rare purity of spirit that he made those melodious stanzas. Yet, throughout them his unceasing amenity as an artist, his sensuous delight in beauty both of fancy and of phrase, embodied the nobler temper of the pagan Renaissance, too—that temper which loved beauty just for beauty's sake. Thus combining something of the purer spirit of the Renaissance with something of the purer spirit of the Reformation, he became, and has remained, a gentle guide to men who seek in either spirit, or in both, helpful solution of eternal mystery.

From the beginning, accordingly, Spenser was destined to be not only a historical fact, but an influence; an influence, however, rather formal than substantial, for the reason that while his form was often excellent, his grasp of substance never had the firmness of simplicity. His very form, the while, had its palpable affectations, particularly in his deliberate archaisms and other oddities of phrase; it had its extreme mannerisms, as well, such as his easily parodied excess of alliteration. And his followers imitated rather his peculiarities than his poetry. Of these later. What we have already remarked will go far to explain some careless comments on him by the most influential poet of immediately succeeding years.

Among those tart notes of Ben Jonson's talk which Drummond made, some twenty years after Spenser died, are two or three remarks about Spenser. Here

is the first: "Spenser's stanzaes pleased him not, nor his matter; the meaning of which Allegorie he had delivered in papers to Sir Walter Raughlie." The classical doctrine of Jonson, you see, had little patience with the Italianate graces which, by that time, Spenser's imitators had developed into newly conventional affectations; nor yet could Jonson patiently submit to the obstacles which Spenser's allegory laboriously interposed between readers and meaning. For all that, as Drummond records a little later, Ben Jonson had "by heart some verses of Spenser's Calender about wyne." If these verses have been rightly identified, they show Jonson loyal to himself; for they are almost the least Spenserian in Spenser:

> Who ever casts to compasse weightye prise,
> And thinkes to throw out thondring words of threate,
> Let powre in lavish cups and thriftie bitts of meate,
> For Bacchus fruite is frend to Phœbus wise;
> And when with wine the braine begins to sweate
> The nombers flowe as fast as spring doth ryse.

Years later, in the "Discoveries," Jonson touched on Spenser more deliberately. His objection to Spenser's manner remained unshaken, but he admitted the graces of Spenser's spirit. "Spenser," he wrote, "affecting the ancients, writ no language; yet I would have him read for his matter, but as Virgil read Ennius." Jonson seems to have stayed deaf to Spenser's melody, and true to his own hatred of affecta-

tion—of any "humour"; true, as well, to that love for purity of dialect which made him such a master of vernacular English. But he could feel, at last, the beauty of Spenser's spirit; and feel, too, what a treasure of elder tradition the Poet's Poet had gathered within the compass of his verse.

I have cited these opinions of Jonson not because of their validity but because of the light they throw on the aspect in which the most memorable effect of Italian influence on Elizabethan poetry presented itself to the poet whose own work embodies the most ripe effect on that poetry of orthodox classical learning. We have already considered Jonson as a dramatist. Puzzling we found him among his contemporaries of the theatre. Almost everybody else followed and adapted the romantic conventions of the native English stage. Jonson, on the other hand, maintained, with characteristic sturdiness, as much as he could of those classical principles to which the stages of France and Italy yielded. His plays, nevertheless, do not seem conventionally pseudo-classic; rather they seem at first completely, though oddly, Elizabethan. This apparent peculiarity we finally attributed to the fact that he was not only master of the classical conventions which he so stoutly maintained; he was also, beyond almost any other writer of his day, a master of vernacular English. So he set forth his purposes not in pedantically conventional dialect, shunning "common and plebeian forms of speech," but in the

vitally human terms which men actually used in dealing with one another. For purity of phrase, indeed, there are few English authors whose vocabulary, to this day, proves more trusty. If you find that Ben Jonson used a word, you may use it fearlessly still. His classicism, in the drama, was a matter rather of spirit than of language. At least, it never led him into phrases whose mere form betrayed it.

In his dramas, no doubt, this somewhat paradoxical combination of classical spirit with vernacular style failed to produce a lastingly happy result. In the lyric poems on which we touch to-day, the result was quite the reverse. Jonson's lyrics are not only scattered through his plays and his masques. He wrote and collected a great many separate ones, very various in kind, in purpose, in merit; and more have been collected since his time. Throughout, these have just the characteristics which we found in his dramas. He was always animated by a belief, based on vitally sympathetic reading of the classics, that any given literary purpose should fall into some given form—that there was one single right way, as distinguished from all other ways, of expressing every single thing. Sometimes laboriously, sometimes more easily, he accordingly tried to make verses as they ought to be made with unfailing artistic conscience. And among the precepts which this conscience seems to have kept before him, two were constant. It was his business, he felt with the best classic of them all, to

be lucid; you shall search his volumes in vain for a line which shall really puzzle you. It was his duty, as well, when he wrote English to write that language and no other; you will be at pains to find in him anywhere an unintentional departure from idiom. There are few styles anywhere more free than his from verbal ingenuity, from affectation of phrase. The humor which possessed him as a poet was chiefly composed of devotion to sound sense and pure language.

These virtues were evident even in his plays. But his conscientious effort to compose plays throughout with orthodox precision, impeded such free range of imagination as often makes more vital the work of far less able men. And meanwhile the unwitting pedantry which lurked beneath the vernacular surface of his dialogue often made its temper puzzling. Again and again, while pretending, with full self-belief, to set forth an image of Renascent English life, he was really expressing the moods—and often translating the very words—of satirists who lived and died despairing amid the decadence of antiquity. No wonder those labored and understanding works of his, exotic at heart, have been overgrown by the wild luxuriance of the native dramatic poetry which was springing up all around them.

With his lyrics, as I have said, the case is different. When, as in plays, motives are complex, the conditions which make their utterance vital are apt to vary with the varying conditions of their historical environment:

forms which suit one state of society often puzzle or bore a different one. When, as in aphorisms or in lyric verses, motives are essentially simple, the forms which suit them are apt to be, like fundamental emotion, unchanging. The very impulse toward form which deadened Jonson's plays accordingly strengthened his lyric poems; and since these, like his plays, were always rendered in an English idiomatic as to phrase, to rhythm, and to metre, you will find his lyrics again and again on the verge of perfection.

None of them is more characteristic than the most familiar:

> Drink to me only with thine eyes,
> And I will pledge with mine;
> Or leave a kiss but in the cup,
> And I'll not ask for wine.
> The thirst, that from the soul doth rise,
> Doth ask a drink divine:
> But might I of Jove's nectar sup,
> I would not change for thine.

Both this stanza and the other are almost literally translated from scattered passages in the letters of Philostratus. That immortally English opening line, for example, is simply an English version of the Greek phrase:

> Ἐμοὶ δὲ μόνοις πρόπινε τοῖς ὄμμασιν.

What Jonson has done is to compose in such exquisite order the stray sentences which he culled from

the prose of a Greek rhetorician, and to phrase them in an English so exquisitely pure that we need effort to feel that Jonson's art in this case was not spontaneous but laboriously understanding. One or two less familiar examples must serve to show on the one hand his deference to his ancient masters, and on the other hand how the spirit that was in him expressed itself more freely. Among his epigrams is one addressed to the Ghost of Martial:

> Martial, thou gav'st far nobler epigrams
> To thy Domitian than I can my James;
> But in my royal subject I pass thee,
> Thou flatter'dst thine, mine cannot flatter'd be.

Here, no doubt, you have Jonson at his laborious worst; but a little earlier in the same collection come the nearly faultless lines he wrote in memory of his little child, Mary:

> At six months' end she parted hence
> With safety of her innocence;
> Whose soul heaven's Queen, whose name she bears,
> In comfort of her mother's tears,
> Hath placed amongst her virgin train;
> Where, while that, severed, doth remain,
> This grave partakes the fleshly birth;
> Which cover lightly, gentle earth!

Already we have enough to show us the mood and the power of the poet who could sturdily assert, in his cups,

that Shakspere wanted art, and could deliberately set down in his note-book that Spenser writ no language. In creative power he never approached either; but in faithful obedience to the orthodox mandates of his artistic conscience he accomplished lyric work so beautiful that even by itself it could have established and maintained authority. And this authority, whatever else, would have kept those who accepted it from extravagance or error. If no daring guide, Jonson would always have been a safe one; and a safe guide he proved. His leadership, however, was not all due to his work; in no slight degree it was a question of his personality combined with the circumstances and the length of his career. He made his sturdy way, everyone knows, from obscurity, through the theatres, to the laureateship which he held so long. Few men of his time had wider opportunity for acquaintance with all sorts and conditions of men, from the vagrants of London streets to royalty itself. He was of convivial habit, too, with a quick, assertive temper of his own; eager to mingle with any company, to cross swords or bludgeons of wit with whoever would meet him; hastily quarrelsome, never rancorous, stoutly assertive; ready, as the old phrase goes, with a kiss or a blow. When he was reconciled to the Church of England he drained the communion-cup to prove his sincerity. And so, with the years, he gathered about him such a company of friends and of disciples as has been paralleled in the records of English litera-

ture only by that which gathered about his great namesake of the eighteenth century.

Like any influence in literature of which those who feel it are aware, this influence of Jonson's personality and of his work tended to grow formal. What made Jonson great was the abiding and pervasive power of his artistic conscience. What his disciples imitated was rather the superficial polish of his lyric achievement. Of his disciples we shall reason later; yet one phase of Jonson's influence, not so evident as that of his lyric masterpieces, we may touch on now. With him, classicism meant only the expression of sound sense in pure language. One is hardly apt, accordingly, to group him with the deliberate pseudo-classic writers of later times, who imposed on English the bondage of the heroic couplet. And yet you can find the germs of their spirit in his. His overwhelming vernacular impulse was a natural result—I had almost said a phase—of the eager experimentation which animated all true Elizabethan poetry. As the early days passed from life into tradition, this enthusiastic impulse was bound to flag. And so, one may see, the the rigidity of form which did not finally cramp literature until long after they had buried Jonson upright in Westminster Abbey, was after all the normal outgrowth of his artistic conscience, passed from vitality into the rigidity of formal creed.

As a man of letters, and a scholar too, whose principles took the shape of doctrine, Jonson was natu-

rally a decided, though not a finally trustworthy, critic of his contemporaries. He read omnivorously, and digested whatever he read, at least enough to reduce the results of his reading to the form of concrete opinion. Expressed, now and again, in his published works, these comments on his fellow writers appear most characteristically in Drummond's notes of his casual talk. He touched on a great many English poets of his time, but on none other so often as on the most eccentric of all, John Donne. Whether this emphasis came of Jonson's own motion or because of questions from Drummond, we can never know; but some of Jonson's dicta have become as familiar as they are emphatic.

"He esteemeth John Done," writes Drummond, "the first poet in the world in some things;" some of Donne's verses, Drummond adds, Jonson had by heart; and he concludes by noting Jonson's assertion that Donne wrote "all his best pieces ere he was twenty-five years old"—that is, before 1598. In another note is set down Jonson's famous assertion on the other side, "That Done, for not keeping of accent, deserved hanging." Elsewhere is Jonson's mistaken, though defensible, prophecy, "That Done, . . . for not being understood, would perish;" elsewhere, again, is a suggestion that this fault was sometimes sportive, for "Done said to him, he wrott that Epitaph on Prince Henry, *Look to me Faith* to match Sir Ed: Herbert in obscurenesse"—a feat which he accom-

plished. Finally, in fact though not in place, comes the statement that Donne "now, since he was made Doctor, repenteth highlie, and seeketh to destroy all his poems." Incidentally, Jonson twice alluded to his own critical comment on Horace's "Art of Poetry," the manuscript of which was accidentally destroyed later; this took the form of a dialogue, in which "by Criticus," one of the interlocutors, "is understood Done." We may fairly infer, I think, that the literary doctrine of Donne was in heretical contradiction to the robust orthodoxy of Jonson; and that the lost dialogue triumphantly confuted this excess of artistic Protestantism.

At all events, though many of Donne's poems were long unpublished, his works were familiar in manuscript to his literary contemporaries; and, whatever else, they were recognized as the most individual of his time. Spenser frankly set forth in English poetry the influence of classical Italian. Jonson sturdily expounded and practised the permanent poetic principles of the enduring classics of antiquity. Donne wrote with utter disregard of both these influences; and, although he was manifestly influenced by the decadent ingenuities which had become fashionable in Italy and in Spain, his English manner was, almost rudely, his own.

Walton's first published biography was a life of Donne, made for an edition of his sermons. The emphasis here is all on his later days of grave divinity,

but enough is set down to show how he was an infant prodigy of precocity; how he lived a wild youth, which bore fruit in much poetic utterance; how he made a romantically imprudent marriage; how, partly as a measure of worldly wisdom, he took orders; how he became a powerful preacher, and was made Dean of St. Paul's; and how, during his last illness, he fantastically had himself swathed in a winding-sheet, and stood, with closed eyes, for that grim portraiture of death which was carved in marble for his monument, which survived the Great Fire, and which may still be seen in St. Paul's, among the few relics of the Elizabethan cathedral.

The Donne with whom we are concerned is not this grave and reverend Doctor of Divinity, who sought in his later years to destroy his poems. The Donne who touches us is the poet, whose verses have been collected, and persist in spite of him. To us they cannot have the sort of surprising quality which, in their own day, attracted instant attention. So far as I can discover, their approach to popularity came not so much from their aggressive peculiarity of form as from the fact that, in contrast to the literature about them, they must have appeared amazingly veracious. Their lack of conventional grace, when other men were so apt to be conventionally graceful, makes them seem astonishingly genuine: they seem to express not fancy, but fact, and in a temper very like that of the art which modern cant calls realistic.

In their own day, this spirit of realism was almost unprecedented; yet if this were all which made Donne memorable, he would be of hardly more than historical interest. And his fame, whether we care for him or not, is proving permanent. We must look a little closer; facing and trying to penetrate the surface of his obscurity. Sometimes, as in that epitaph on Prince Henry, this obscurity was mischievously deliberate:

> Look to me, faith, and look to my faith, God;
> For both my centres feel this period.
> Of weight one centre, one of greatness is;
> And reason is that centre, faith is this.

Yet even here one can feel the man's lasting power. Thoughtful to the degree of an over-ingenuity which here he frankly parodies—Herbert, and Greville, to name no more, had already been more ingenious still—he always manages to express himself also with a surgent, yet repressed, emotional power which makes him, among the poets of his time, the most intense. His obscurity is not a matter of language; his vocabulary is almost as pure as Jonson's own. The difficulties of him spring rather from this pervasive intensity, which strives, deliberately or instinctively, to charge his lines with a heavier burden of thought and feeling than any lines could unbendingly carry. Accordingly he seems, once for all, to disdain the oddities into which the lines distort themselves under the strain.

You can feel this peculiarity almost everywhere. Among his earlier poems are the "Satires," in every sense the least palpably conventional, and so apparently the most genuine, of his time and perhaps of our language. Here is a bit from one of them, which chances still to be repeatable:

> Gracchus loves all as one, and thinks that so
> As women do in divers countries go
> In divers habits, yet are still one kind,
> So doth, so is religion; and this blind-
> Ness too much light breeds. But unmovèd thou
> Of force must one, and forced but one allow;
> And the right. Ask thy father which is she;
> Let him ask his. Though Truth and Falsehood be
> Near twins, yet Truth a little elder is.

For not keeping of accent, no doubt Donne deserved hanging; but he could plead in confession and avoidance this intensity which was all his own.

He never lost it, furthermore; rather he developed it. In his graver years, for example, just when Webster was publishing that preface to the "White Devil," Donne's intensity produced such lines as these:

> The world is but a carcass; thou art fed
> By it, but as a worm that carcass bred;
> And why shouldst thou, poor worm, consider more
> When this world will grow better than before,
> Than those thy fellow-worms do think upon
> That carcass's last resurrection?

You cannot but feel the intense genuineness of this comparison. At the same time, its exasperating over-ingenuity is just of the kind which Dr. Johnson so stoutly belabored in his comments on the figure of the compass, to which, long before, Donne had likened the souls of two lovers:

> If they be two, they are two so
> As stiff twin compasses are two;
> Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
> To move, but doth, if th' other do.
>
> And though it in the centre sit,
> Yet, when the other far doth roam,
> It leaves, and hearkens after it,
> And grows erect, as that comes home.
>
> Such wilt thou be to me, who must
> Like th' other foot obliquely run;
> Thy firmness makes my circle just,
> And makes me end where I begun.

In both of these passages, over-ingenious though they be, you can feel the power of Donne. In neither, nor in anything we have glanced at yet, can you feel the vividness or the beauty which now and again consecrates this power. For an example of his vividness, take those lines from the "Calm," which Jonson had by heart:

> No use of lanthorns; and in one place lay
> Feathers and dust, to-day and yesterday.

For an example of his beauty, take stray lines from the love-lyrics, generally so far from austerity that there need be no wonder why Donne regretted them in his reverend days. Yet, even at his sternest, he need not have cast away such stanzas as this:

> O, do not die, for I shall hate
> All women so, when thou art gone,
> That thee I shall not celebrate,
> When I remember thou wast one.

Better, still, take the haunting melody of those two lines of Donne which are most familiar—so familiar, indeed, as to be almost hackneyed:

> I long to talk with some old lover's ghost,
> Who died before the god of love was born.

Already we have dwelt on him more than enough to feel that intensity of individuality which made his work in his own time seem real beyond the rest, and which, with all its disdain of amenity, makes his verse in these days of ours reveal more and more to those who ponder it most.

Intense individuality, the while, is of all artistic influences the most destructive. Crescent art anywhere is that which is rooted in immemorial convention. Art which deliberately contradicts tradition is bound, however genuine, to be a noble heresy. The heresiarchs have something delusively like the virtue of the saints. It is only when we trace the extinction

of their followers that we can feel the tragedy of their faithful and honest aberrations. The influence of Spenser could never quite lose the amenity of his Italianate grace; that of Jonson could never quite lose the civility of his classical poise; that of Donne was bound to fall into the affectations of a mannerism which grew lifeless the moment the master who vitalized it fell asleep.

Analogies are doubtless misleading, and those critics are right who have objected to the commonplace which has asserted that Donne was an Elizabethan Browning. Yet there is a suggestion of truth in the extended analogy—whose very imperfections help to correct its errors—which would liken in their mutual relations the three divergent Elizabethans on whom we have now touched to three eminent poets of the nineteenth century. Spenser was less like Wordsworth than Jonson was like Tennyson; and Jonson was less like Tennyson than Donne was like Browning; and Donne was, on the whole, so little like Browning that the comparison by itself is rather misleading than helpful. Yet when Spenser died, in 1599, Jonson and Donne were already pointing the ways in which Elizabethan poetry must disintegrate, very much as, when Wordsworth died, in 1850, Tennyson and Browning were already pointing the divergent ways in which the English poetry of the nineteenth century has begun to lose what integrity it ever had. If we liken Spenser to Wordsworth, accordingly, and Jonson to

Tennyson, and Donne to Browning, we may feel—for all the dissimilarities which must often obscure all trace of similarity—what those mean who believe, in our day, that human expression must yield to natural law as surely as the stars in their courses.

For, though it would be foolish to say that Spenser, and Jonson, and Donne caused the disintegration of Elizabethan poetry, there can be no doubt, I think, that the three distinct tendencies, or influences, embodied in the work of these three divergent masters portend, with precision, the courses which that poetical disintegration was to take.

V

THE DISINTEGRATION OF LYRIC POETRY

In approaching this consideration of the separate literary tendencies which found expression in Spenser, in Ben Jonson, and in Donne, I touched on the fact that the ensuing disintegration of English poetry was an example of how natural law revealed its power even in so subtly human a matter as the development and the decline of literature. Yet no man has been able to formulate the laws which dominate human expression—perhaps in their complexity beyond the range of generalization. And taking refuge in such half-truths, misleading if we believe them wholly, as marked the slow waking of science from chaos, men are apt nowadays to class this poet or that as if he were some monstrous creature of Jonsonian humor. We talk of the influence of Spenser much as the old astrologers prated of what they fancied the literal influence of a planet. We are apt to be more neglectful still of complex truth; more unwilling, indeed, than our astrologic forbears, to admit, without discontent, how influences must forever intermingle. That the early years of the seventeenth century produced poets who reverently imitated Spenser everyone knows; so

we are apt to call them Spenserian—as if imitation of Spenser were all their story. One or two familiar passages should warn us of our danger. Among the poets commonly described as Spenserian were William Browne, of Tavistock; Giles Fletcher, and George Wither.

Browne surely held Spenser his master, writing of him thus:

> He sung the heroic knights of Fairy-land
> In lines so elegant, of such command,
> That had the Thracian played but half so well,
> He had not left Eurydice in Hell.
> But ere he ended his melodious song
> An host of angels flew the clouds among,
> And rapt this swan from his attentive mates,
> To make him one of their associates
> In Heaven's fair quire.

And, writing pastorally, Browne could follow Spenser's manner very closely. Take, for example, lines like these:

> As when a woodman on the greeny lawns,
> Where daily chants the sad-sweet nightingale,
> Would count his herd, more bucks, more prickets, fawns
> Rush from the copse and put him from his tale;
> So when my willing muse would gladly dress
> Her several graces in immortal lines,
> Plenty empoors her.

Superficially this might be mistaken for Spenser; but, looking a little closer, you will observe how the

oddities of Spenser's vocabulary have given place to a purity of phrase almost like Jonson's. You can discern, too, in Browne's final paradox a suggestion of "metaphysical poetry." And so, perhaps, you will not feel the wonder we are apt to feel at first when we are forced to admit that in all probability it was not Jonson, but this Spenserian Browne, who wrote that beautiful little epitaph:

> Underneath this sable hearse
> Lies the subject of all verse:
> Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother:
> Death, ere thou hast slain another,
> Fair, and learned, and good as she
> Time shall throw a dart at thee.

Again, the very opening pages of Giles Fletcher's "Christ's Victorie in Heaven" contain line after line which prove him Spenserian. Take the fourth stanza:

> Ye Sacred writings, in whose antique leaves
> The memories of Heaven entreasured lie,
> Say, what might be the cause that Mercie heaves
> The dust of sin above the industrious skie,
> And lets it not to dust and ashes flie?

Or take the sixth stanza, with its clear allusion to the last lines of the "Faerie Queene":

> There is a place beyond that flaming hill,
> From whence the starres their thin appearance shed;
> A place beyond all place, where never ill,

Nor impure thought was ever harborèd,
But saintly heros are forever s'ed
To keepe an everlasting Sabbaoth's rest.

Here is Spenser, no doubt, his music harshened but audible still; yet here, too, are Jonsonianly English words, in place of that "no language" which Spenser writ. And the paradoxes with which Fletcher begins the poem indicate more metaphysical influence than you can trace anywhere in Browne:

The birth of him that no beginning knewe,
Yet gives beginning to all that are borne;
And how the Infinite far greater grew
By growing less, and how the rising Morne
That shot from heav'n, did back to heav'n retourne:
The obsequies of Him that could not die,
And death of life, end of eternitie,
How worthily He died, that died unworthily;—
. . . . . .
Is the first flame, wherewith my whiter Muse
Doth burne in heavenly love, such love to tell.

A case might be made out from these lines that Giles Fletcher was a follower rather of Donne.

In Wither's Pastorals, too, are fainter echoes of Spenser in plenty; the music has lost its melody, but not its rhythm. Yet what makes Wither a living poet are not these pastorals, nor yet his somewhat pale satires; and surely it is not the flood of devout verse which welled from him in his later years. It is that single song of his earlier days:

> Shall I, wasting in despair
> Dye, because a woman's fair?

And this is neither Spenserian, nor quite an utterance of the Tribe of Ben, nor yet metaphysical. It is rather a sporadic survival of that spirit which made integral, and not disintegrating, the lyrics of the spacious days themselves.

To call this group of poets Spenserian, accordingly, meaning thereby that they echoed nobody but Spenser, might well seem mistaken; just as it might seem to assert that the Tribe of Ben included no man who did not yield himself body and soul to that robust chief; or still more, as it might to pretend that poets in whose lines we can detect "metaphysical" ingenuities were all disciples only of Donne. And yet the use of these three divergent terms, so frequent in discussions of English poetry from the accession of King James to the death of Charles I., points to a real fact. Up to the time when Spenser's individuality finally declared itself, English poetry seemed integral in spirit—marked chiefly by the spontaneous enthusiasm of its versatile and winsome experiment. A very little later than Spenser, there emerged, side by side, the almost equally distinct figures of Jonson and of Donne, very different from each other, different as well from Spenser, but like him and like each other in the fact that each of them brought to a point beyond that where their predecessors had left it the kind of poetry which he made peculiarly his own.

With them, in brief, experiment came to the dignity of mastery; and, as we look at their work in historical perspective, their individualities stand out more and more distinctly.

With the poets who swiftly followed them, the case is different. It is not that these were only conscious imitators, nor yet that many of them deliberately imitated one master, and only one. These later poets, besides, prove, when one ponders over them with care, to have distinct individualities of their own. But of all together, the fact remains evident that none has an individuality so distinct as instantly to impress us. Rather we feel at first that each is no longer experimental, but that he is openly or tacitly aware of how admirably the art he would practise has already been mastered; and that his task has therefore become different from that which confronted the masters themselves. Accepting their manners and their achievements as models, as traditions, as conventions, he seems first of all one of their followers, and only secondarily himself.

This is surely true of those poets commonly called Spenserian—Giles Fletcher and Phineas, we may take as types of them, with Browne and Wither. No doubt each of them deserves study in detail. Each has his beauties; each his faults; each something like a message of his own; each, too, his somewhat intricate relations with the men about him and with the future, as well as with their common master. We

might remark, for example, how the Fletchers—Puritan in temper, though not extremely so in instant aspect—may be regarded as the link between Spenser and Milton. The subject-matter of Giles Fletcher's "Christ's Victories," and the Hell and Lucifer of Phineas Fletcher's "Apollyonists," to go no further, have such analogies to the great epic of Milton's later years that even for this alone the brothers would be memorable. We might touch on the fastidious culture of Browne, revealing itself not only in traces throughout his fluent work of how deeply and lovingly he had read our elder poets, from Chaucer down, but also in that exquisite care for phrase which has made more than one modern critic liken him to Keats. We might recall how Wither was first a royalist and then a parliamentarian; how he repented of the amatory verse of his earlier years; how his rather mild satires got him into disproportionate trouble; how his pastoral poems are the most deeply marked with the imprint of his Elizabethan master; and how the floods of sacred and occasional verse which followed have now and again a simplicity or a commonplaceness, or oftener both, not wholly unlike what make so tedious the inexhaustible productions which poured from Wordsworth after his inspiration was exhausted. More, too, and more—merits and faults alike—we could doubtless find in one and all. More names, too, we might doubtless mention. Yet, when all was done, and we strove to render ourselves account of what we had thus scru-

tinized in detail, the facts which we should finally remember are probably those which have caused critics to group these men together.

On the whole, they impress us as disciples chiefly of Spenser—as practitioners of the art which his adventurous experiment discovered. Spenser himself, in the full Elizabethan days, imitated Italian models; but his achievement was so gloriously his own that no reader of Spenser ever thinks of those models as primary. His followers imitated him—perhaps as freely, to their own minds, as he had imitated his own masters. With them, nevertheless, for all their individuality, you always think first of Spenser. He remains dominant; what the Spenserians themselves accomplished seems only secondary. And so, when we further remember that this Spenserian poetry was at its height in the time of King James I.—when Beaumont and Fletcher dominated the stage, and when Webster's work was beginning, and Ford's and Massinger's, too—we have said of the Spenserians what makes them chiefly significant in our present study.

It was in King James's time that Ben Jonson was at his best and most potent; at that same time, too, the poems of Donne, mostly written earlier and mostly published later, were growing more and more familiar in private copies. The influence of each, no doubt, steadily increased; but the full effect of each did not instantly appear. In Professor Schelling's excellent

introduction to the volume of "Seventeenth Century Lyrics," with which he supplemented his "Elizabethan Lyrics," he points out how the poems which have the distinctive quality of the new century hardly began before 1625. The poets who are regularly grouped in the Tribe of Ben were not at their best until fifteen or twenty years later.

It was twelve years after the accession of King Charles, indeed, that his sturdy Elizabethan laureate died. Early in the following year, 1638, appeared a volume of memorable poems by many of his admiring disciples. The names of the contributors to this "Jonsonus Virbius; or, the Memory of Ben Jonson revived by the Friends of the Muses," suggest at once the numbers of the school he had founded, the breadth of its social and intellectual range, and the slight poetic eminence which most of its members attained. In general, the makers of these perfunctory occasional verses in the dead master's manner are of only historical importance. Lord Falkland opens the volume with a long eclogue. Then come ten lines by Lord Buckhurst; then longer series of couplets by Sir John Beaumont and Sir Thomas Hawkins; Henry King follows, and Henry Coventry, and Thomas May, and Dudley Diggs, and George Fortescue. Then, at last, William Habington reminds us that we are still within the confines of literature; and next comes a page of couplets by Waller, followed by five more couplets bearing the signature of James Howell. John Vernon,

è Societ In Temp, who comes next, takes us back nowhere. Cleveland, who follows him with a gleam of familiar light, seems to have written two poems—one signed only with his initials. J. Mayne then contributes the longest item since Falkland's eclogue. And so on. These are the ensuing names: W. Cartwright, Jo. Rutter, Ow. Feltham, George Donne, Shackerly Marmion, John Ford, R. Brideoake, Richard West, R. Meade, and H. Ramsay. Sir Francis Wortley, by way of variety, then contributes a Latin epitaph; he is followed by a few other Latin versifiers, and by a final anonymous set of verses in Greek. Of all these latter names, the only one instantly familiar to modern readers of poetry is that of Ford. The list, as a whole, rather comically reminds one of that in which, two centuries later, Edgar Allan Poe brought together the names of the Literati—now otherwise extinct—who illuminated in 1840 the literature of New York. For the Tribe of Ben, so far as it still lives, we shall have to look elsewhere than among these lucid and lifeless makers of lines to his memory.

The best remembered among his disciples are three courtiers of King Charles—Carew, Suckling, and Lovelace—who made graceful verses for fashion's sake; and the solitary Robert Herrick, on whom we shall touch a little later. Of the three courtier poets, Carew was the eldest, on the whole the best, and the least salient. He could write after Donne, when he chose; witness the opening of the elegy he made to Donne's memory:

Can we not force from widow'd Poetry,
Now thou art dead, great Donne, one Elegy
To crown thy Hearse? Why yet did we not trust,
Though with unkneaded, dough-baked prose, thy dust;
Such as the unsizar'd Lecturer, from the flower
Of fading Rhetoric, short-lived as his hour,
Dry as the sand that measures it, might lay
Upon the ashes on the funeral day?

Witness, too, the extravagance of Carew's occasional conceits:

Oh, whither is my fair Sun fled
  Bearing his light, not heat, away?
If thou repose in the moist bed
  Of the Sea Queen, bring back the day
To our dark clime, and thou shalt lie
  Bathed in the sea, flows from mine eye.

But he mostly followed Jonson, yet with something effeminate always weakening the virility of the acknowledged master. In a Prologue to Jonson's "New Inn," after touching on Ben's detractors, he closes his panegyric thus:

Thou art not of their rank, the quarrel lies
Within thine own verge: then let this suffice—
The wiser world doth greater Thee confess
Then all men else, than thy self only less.

And the grace of Carew's verse, sentimentally feminizing Jonson's, you can feel in stanzas like this:

Ask me no more where Jove bestows,
When June is past, the fading rose?

For in your Beauty's orient deep
These flowers, as in their causes, sleep.

Ask me no more, whither do stray
The golden atoms of the day?
For in pure love heaven did prepare
These powders to enrich thy hair.

Better still, perhaps, you will feel at once his relation to Jonson and the limits of it in his epitaphs. Here is a bit from that to Lady Mary Wentworth, who died at eighteen:

Good to the Poor, to kindred dear,
To servants kind, to friendship clear,
To nothing but herself severe;

So, though a virgin, yet a Bride
To every grace, she justified
A chaste Polygamy, and died.

There are graces here which Jonson could hardly have excelled, and a conceit which Donne could not have parodied. That same conceit meanwhile typifies —enough for us—the decadent eroticism which by this time had invaded not only the drama but lyric poetry as well.

Carew was tolerably even. With Suckling and Lovelace the case is different. The good work of each is rare enough to be memorably salient. One or two of Suckling's lyrics are still familiar:

Why so pale and wan, fond lover?
Prithee why so pale?
Will, when looking well can't move her,
Looking ill prevail?
Prithee why so pale?

Everyone knows that stanza; this, too:

Out upon it, I have loved
Three whole days together,
And am like to love three more,
If it prove fair weather.

In these one feels a touch of Jonson's grace; but it is weakened by careless triviality. And a less familiar stanza of Suckling's indicates his relation to Jonson with odd precision. Remember "Drink to me only with thine eyes," and then listen to this sweetly feeble echo of it:

I prithee send me back my heart,
Since I cannot have thine;
For if from yours you will not part
Why then shouldst thou have mine?

A feeble Son of Ben he was after all. And so, in general, Lovelace seems, too; but the one lasting poem of Lovelace approaches perfection more nearly than we can quite realize without a momentary comparison of its second line with the figure he stole from one of Habington's stanzas to "Roses in the Bosom of Castara":

Ye blushing virgins happy are
In the chaste nunn'ry of her breasts,
For he'd prophane so chaste a fair,
Who e'er should call them Cupid's nests.

A single glance is enough for such sentimentality as that; it is the glory of Lovelace that when the stress of the Civil Wars was at hand, he was stirred to that one utterance of his which no degree of repetition can tarnish:

Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind,
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind
To war and arms I fly.

True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field;
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
As you too shall adore:
I could not love thee, dear, so much
Loved I not honour more.

Such was the Tribe of Ben at its best—all but Herrick, of whom by and by. They kept the sense of form which he had wrested from his classics; they lost his virile muscularity; they sentimentalized his graces, weakening them, too, with occasional "metaphysical" fancies; but they had a charm which might seem their own, if we were not so sure that its secret

came from Jonson as straight as the rhythm of the Spenserians came from the "Shepherd's Calendar" and the "Faerie Queene."

Throughout our swift scrutiny of both we must have felt traces of that over-ingenuity—that "metaphysical" elaboration of conceit—which is generally traced to the influence of Donne. The Spenserians thus seem not only to follow Spenser, with harshening variations of his music; the Tribe of Ben seems not only to follow Jonson, with steps lacking the firmness of his virility; but both seem to follow Donne as well, with little trace of the intensity which was his own justification. Something of Jonson's influence, more, too, of Spenser's, shows itself in the work of that other group of poets which is sometimes called "metaphysical," as if Donne had been their only master. The religious poets, I mean, of whom perhaps the most typical are George Herbert and Vaughan and Crashaw. Each and all had an intensity which makes intensity seem the chief characteristic of this diverse yet distinct group. You will feel this instantly in some familiar lines from Vaughan,—the first concerning earth, the second concerning heaven. Of the world he writes:

> I saw Eternity the other night
> Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
> All calm, as it was bright;
> And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years,
> Driv'n by the spheres,

Like a vast shadow moved, in which the world
And all her train were hurled.

Here is something like an intricate variation on some melody of Spenser, sweetening, yet not weakening, that intensity and ingenuity which makes many critics name Vaughan, for all his spiritual individuality, a mere follower of Donne. Of heaven he writes with a simplicity like Jonson's, yet with a holy intensity of lyric feeling beyond any fire which ever emanated from Saint Ben:

My soul, there is a country
Afar beyond the stars,
Where stands a winged sentry
All skilful in the wars.
There, above noise and danger,
Sweet Peace sits crowned with smiles,
And one born in a manger
Commands the beauteous files.
If thou canst get but thither,
There grows the flower of peace,
The rose that cannot wither,
Thy fortress and thy ease.

Here is a new spirit—new not only in these studies of ours, but in all English poetry. Combining as they did that deep personal sense of religion and those austere ideals of personal purity which made the true strength of Puritanism with an exquisitely cultivated sense of beauty—like that which ennobled even the license of the Cavaliers—these religious poets, "meta-

physical," if you will, expressed beyond Spenserians or Sons of Ben, an everlasting truth. There are moods in which one feels them wonderful exponents of what preserves, among all the shocks and deadenings of human frailty, the diuturnity of the Church. But they were not only thus poets of a new spirit; they were also lingering followers of their Elizabethan masters. In their work, as surely as in that of their contemporaries at whom we have glanced before, one feels, when one pauses to define it in the perspective of the centuries, how the poetic form, even of their spiritual utterances, was inevitably influenced by the poetic forms of the generation before them. What is more, this intensity is strangely different from the integral enthusiasm of the times which they could almost remember. The fervor of Elizabethan poetry had in it something which seemed to emanate from the whole English nation. The fervor of the religious poets who were at their best under King Charles was only—though sincerely—individual. Each writes as one apart from the world.

The English lyric never had such deep-rooted popular life as the English drama; and so, in a way, the changes of the years affected it far less. You can transplant flowers and shrubs; to uproot trees is fatal. Yet, in the history of other than dramatic poetry, we have traced a course like that which brought the drama to an end. This lyric poetry began, like the drama, with free, enthusiastic experiment, breaking

from old conventions. Then came a moment of mastery. Then came the disintegration which could not help following from the separate manner of the divergent masters. The Elizabethans had made their new conventions; the later men must perforce submit to these new authorities. Whatever variety of beautiful detail the later poets might attempt, they could not help being increasingly conscious of the authority imposed on them by the masterpieces already achieved in the manner which a generation before was new and free. And so, though without either the corruption or the servility which marked the decline of the stage from Shakspere to Shirley, we have found that English lyric poetry disintegrated, along with the drama, until—half unwittingly—we are far from the days when we could contentedly summarize the spirit of it in that single song of Campion's.

It had arrived, in fact, at a point where, for coming men, the choice seemed to lie between exaggeration of newly grown conventions or deliberate reaction from them. In those very days both tendencies were evident. The seventeenth century had two poets of vast contemporary fame, whose work now seems so dead that we marvel how it could ever have been alive. One of these, Sir William Davenant, seems truly as hollow a sham as ever was his shameless sham bastardy. The other, Cowley, had a spark of the true fire, and perhaps more. In Milton's own day, good men held him Milton's better. But, like

the shams of Davenant, the ingenious excesses of Cowley need detain us no longer thus when we have discerned in them examples of how soon conventions, when they are followed with servility, must prove lifeless. In these same years, as Mr. Gosse has pointed out so clearly, Waller, a poet partly of the Tribe of Ben, openly rejected the older conventions and marked —with poems of great historic interest—the course which English poetry was to take on its way to the couplet of Pope. Denham, too, one might recall a very little later, with his "Cooper's Hill,"—that harbinger of the deep poetry of nature still to come, which Dryden once called "the exact standard of good writing." Historically important though they be, however, none of these seem precisely the most typical man of their time. In 1600, you will remember, I found my memory unconsciously selecting as typical a lyric of Campion's; in 1648 I find that my memory, with equal persistency, selects the work of that one follower in the Tribe of Ben whom I have therefore reserved till now—Robert Herrick.

Partly, no doubt, this is a personal matter. When I turn to most of the poets of King Charles's time, I find myself willing to delight in their graces, but glad, after all, when the task of seeking those graces is done. Herrick, on the other hand, is never wearisome. A loyal son of Ben, delighting with a quiet zest all his own in the convivialities with which his robust master was apt to be surrounded, he was forced

by chance into the solitude of a country parsonage. The "Noble Numbers" prove him not faithless to his spiritual duties; here is the first stanza of them on which my eye chances to fall:

> Lord, I am like to mistletoe,
> Which has no root, and cannot grow
> Or prosper but by that same tree
> It clings about; so I by Thee.

But it is not thus that one thinks of him. He generally seems the sportive parson, ready out of hours to take simple, gay, pensive delight in the trivialities which can console country solitude. So he sang his little songs of pleasure in country sports, in fruits and flowers, in pretty girls; and through them all runs something like a bird's note — exquisite, untiring, sweetly repetitory, always ready to begin afresh.

One can feel it in that little quatrain from the "Noble Numbers." One can feel it in his fantastic little "Prayer to Ben Jonson":

> When I a verse shall make,
> Know I have pray'd thee,
> For old religion's sake,
> Saint Ben, to aid me.
> Make the way smooth for me,
> When I, thy Herrick,
> Knowing thee, on my knee
> Offer my lyric.
> Candles I'll give to thee,
> And a new altar,
> And then, Saint Ben, shalt be
> Writ in my psalter.

One can feel Herrick's peculiar quality, more distinctly still, in the lines, scattered through the Hesperides, which enshrine the pretty memory of his country servant:

I

Prew, my dearest maid, is sick
Almost to be lunatic.
Æsculapius, come and bring
Means for her recovering;
And a gallant cock shall be
Offered up by her to thee.

II

These summer birds did with thy master stay
The times of warmth, but then they flew away,
Leaving their poet, being now grown old,
Exposed to all the coming winter's cold.
But thou, kind Prew, didst with my fates abide
As well the winter's as the summer's tide;
For which thy love, live with thy master here,
Not one, but all the seasons of the year.

III

Here, here I live with what my board
Can with the smallest cost afford.
Though ne'er so mean the viands be,
They will content my Prew and me.
Or pea, or bean, or wort, or beet,
Whatever comes, content makes sweet.
We bless our fortunes when we see
Our own beloved privacy;
And like our living, where we're known
To very few, or else to none.

And when at last she died, he made an epitaph for her which muses might have inspired through Saint Ben's own conduits:

IV

In this little urn is laid
Prudence Baldwin, once my maid:
From whose happy spark here let
Spring the purple violet.

Yet one can feel that little quatrain to be not Jonson's, but Herrick's. Browne's lines on the Countess of Pembroke are indistinguishable from lines by Ben. Herrick, devout worshipper of his pagan saint though he were, has left hardly a phrase which is not sweet with his own dainty, country melody.

So, in his own way and in his own time, his verses spring to memory more and more. In miniature, in pretty statement and sweetly fantastic grace, he finally outdoes the master. One may well linger over him until one forget for a while all but the delight which never fails. Thus he becomes the poet of his time who, at least in my memory, seems, by unconscious selection, the most typical.

If, with this aspect of Herrick in mind, we turn to compare him with poets who were typical of English literature forty years before him, we shall find a startling contrast. There is no better way to show it than by reverting for a moment to the "Faerie Queene." In the midst of this first great outburst of our triumphant poetry—freed at last from the

cramping distortions of the untamed old language from whose bondage it broke its way to life—there lies, half hidden, a lovely little song. Spenser, no doubt, translated it directly from Tasso, and Tasso had probably found in Ausonius what is now its most familiar phrase. But Spenser's translation is so admirable that whoever reads it must instinctively think of it as if it were Spenser's own:

The whiles some one did chaunt this lovely lay:
  Ah! see, whoso faire thing doest fain to see,
In springing flowre the image of thy day.
  Ah! see the Virgin Rose, how sweetly shee
  Doth first peepe foorth with bashfull modestie,
That fairer seemes the lesse ye see her may.
  Lo! see soon after how more bold and free
Her bared bosom she doth broad display;
Lo! see soon after how she fades and falls away.

So passeth, in the passing of a day,
  Of mortall life the leafe, the bud, the flowre;
Ne more doth flourish after first decay,
  That earst was sought to deck both bed and bowre
  Of many a lady, many a Paramoure;
Gather therefore the Rose, whilest yet is prime
  For soone comes age that will her pride deflowre;
Gather the Rose of love whilest yet is time,
Whilest loving thou mayest loved be with equall crime.

You cannot fail to feel the likeness of those last four lines to the quatrain of Herrick which has chanced to become the most familiar of all he ever wrote:

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may
Old time is still a-flying:
And this same flower that smiles to-day
To-morrow will be dying.

The very likeness between these passages emphasizes the still more evident contrast. And, taken together, the likeness and the contrast imply the whole history of English poetry during the period of which we have been trying to render ourselves account. Fifty years and more apart, two English poets—each in his way a thorough man of his time—were attracted by the same sweetly sentimental fragment of dainty classical eroticism:

Collige, virgo, rosas, dum flos novus, et nova pubes,
Et memor esto aevum sic properare tuum,

it runs in Ausonius. Each translated this into a form so deeply English that one is half surprised to find its origin in antiquity; and the two forms have a likeness which makes one guess that Spenser's lines may have haunted the memory of Herrick just as Tasso's version of the passage surely haunted the memory of Spenser. And Spenser made a "lovely lay," not lost but still not salient among the profuse beauties of his inexhaustible treasuries of poetry; and Herrick made a final little quatrain, far less grand in manner, and yet so much more near perfection that as one listens to his lines one feels them ultimate, in their exquisite harmony of spontaneity and intelli-

gence. The old comparison recurs to mind. Spenser's verses are like a section of some vigorous tree, pushing its crest skyward; Herrick's are like an exquisite flower, blooming on some little branch so far from the centre of its life that its own perfection seems its whole excuse for being. Here growth can go no further. The true course of life lies elsewhere. Yet there are moments when one feels content with the flower alone, caring for the trunk which bore it only because of this final, fleeting burden of beauty.

There is no such decadence here as we traced in the drama. When Spenser wrote, that more popular kind of poetry was in the full flush of its beginning; when Herrick's "Hesperides" was published, the faint copies of Shirley had already been suppressed for the six years which had followed the closing of the theatres. And, in spite of the gross eroticism and other extravagance which intruded themselves into lyric poetry, too, when the drama was so swiftly declining, the lyrics never sunk into a state of repellent decay. But by Herrick's time they had lost their old buoyant integrity of lyric impulse, which had made the elder poets seem first brethren and only secondarily individuals. Soon came divergence; this or that distinct tendency or master began to separate the younger poets into groups, not unfriendly or mutually distrustful, but no longer integral with one another. Of the masters three clearly surpassed the rest—Spenser, with his Italianate grace; Jonson, with his assimilated classi-

cism; and Donne, with that intense individuality of which Carew could write:

> The Muses Garden, with pedantic weeds
> O'erspread, was purged by thee; the lazy seeds
> Of servile Imitation thrown away
> And fresh Invention planted

Then came men of lesser range, of more narrow scope, each and all impelled chiefly by the influence which flowed from one or another of the masters. And so, when we think of Spenser and of Campion, in the elder days, we think of them first together and then apart. But when we think of the Spenserian Browne, for example, and of Vaughan with his metaphysical ecstasies, and of Herrick, loyal to the Tribe of Ben, we think of them first apart and then together.

We have hardly mentioned the one great poet who was growing toward his maturity in these disintegrant times. For our purposes Milton is so important that we must by and by consider him alone. We have touched now on the poetical surroundings of his early days. Before we come to him we must touch on other surroundings too.

But meanwhile we must not forget the chief purpose which brings us together; this is to trace, if we may, those changes in the national temper of England which made it, in Dryden's time, so different from what it was when the century began, and when English literature was dominated by Shakspere. We have ren-

dered ourselves, accordingly, some account of what Elizabethan temper was, in all the integrity of its spontaneous, enthusiastic, versatile, literary experiment. Then we have considered the course of the drama, first disintegrant, later decadent to the point of extinction—bespeaking, above all things else, a loss of the old national integrity, a growth apart of some special race of play-goers, still delighting in traces of the elder splendors, but less and less able to discern the difference between stars and spangles. Next we have been considering the course which lyric poetry took the while; and, for all the truth and beauty which resided to the end in English lyrics, we found without precise decadence trace after trace of just such disintegration as preceded the decadence of the drama. The only truly new note which we have yet detected is in itself a widely, remotely specialized one, such as inspired the ecstatic solitude of Vaughan's religious utterances. This very individual solitude of the later poets implies the truth we should now keep most clearly in mind. In the days of King James and of King Charles, both lyric and dramatic poetry indicate how the national temper of England was no longer so deeply at one that any single poetic expression could summarize it at all; and furthermore, how the robustness of the elder time had faded out of literature. Our next business must be to inquire how that national temper revealed itself, the while, in the less deliberately artistic vehicle of prose.

VI

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROSE

THE BIBLE AND BACON

PERHAPS inevitably, the abundance of material lately before us has a little obscured the purpose we are trying to follow. Our object is to trace, so far as we may, the processes by which the national temper of England changed during the seventeenth century, when its literature passed from the period of Shakspere to that of Dryden. And these processes we must, of course, consider chiefly as they reveal themselves in literature. Now, literature we agreed to define as the lasting expression in words of the meaning of life. For us, accordingly, seventeenth century literature includes not the whole production of the period, but only such parts of that production as the unconscious, instinctive selection of posterity has found memorable. That quality of duration, of lastingness, is essential to such matter as we have agreed to consider together.

Nor is this unreasonable. As truly as one who looks at a landscape must take his stand in some one spot, from whence his surroundings fall into a perspective true nowhere else, so, I think, a student of human affairs, who strives to see them in their mutual

relations, must choose the point of view from which he would regard them. Rather, perhaps, he must frankly recognize the point of view where circumstances beyond his power place him. We are living, for example, in the first years of the twentieth century, and at this moment we are concerning ourselves with men who were alive, and with forces which were at work, three hundred years ago. So placed, there is before us a pretty clear alternative. Either we must painfully and studiously try to sweep back the tide of time until we can faintly revive some ghostly image of Elizabethan days, or else, admitting where and what we are, we must ask ourselves how these elder days appear to us, here and now, in the perspective of the centuries.

The whole truth no man can ever know. Aspects of truth all men can see who will plant their feet and use their eyes. Of which aspects, when we turn our eyes to the past, none seem more certain than the names and the records which the present keeps in mind —the eminences which grow the more distinct for their very distance. What men have not forgotten is memorable just because it is remembered.

Thus glancing back at the elder days, before our closer scrutiny should begin, we could see, perhaps more clearly than from any lesser distance of time, some features of that Elizabethan England from which have sprung the national tempers both of England and of our distinct America. In the days of Queen Eliza-

beth, the national life of England had an integrity all its own; Elizabethan literature had a freshness a spontaneity, an enthusiasm which expressed itself chiefly in eagerness for versatile experiment. The bonds of the past had been weakened or broken; the bonds of the future were still unforged. And literature, surging with the power of aspiring, unchecked imagination, burst forth into a poetry which seems undying. The lyric achievement of those days was surpassed only by the dramatic; and both lyric poetry and dramatic were so abundant that, when we came to render ourselves account of them in detail, their very abundance proved momentarily confusing.

This abundance persisted when we asked ourselves next what course this poetry took in either way. Lyric poetry and dramatic alike we had seen to begin with spontaneous, enthusiastic, versatile experiment. We chose to consider each apart. So, considering the drama, in its own transitory moment the most characteristic expression of the national integrity of Elizabethan England, we saw how its eager experiments resulted in the various manners which inventive men developed each for himself, and which Shakspere flexibly followed. We saw how swiftly the consciousness of this achievement imposed on the later men a sense of tradition which checked the freedom of romantic play-writing, and made it finally obedient to freshly accepted conventions of its own. Meanwhile, we saw how corruption of temper invaded the stage,

how fastidiousness and excess replaced the old spontaneous ease and freedom. And so came the swift decline. Imaginative outburst came first; then came a little while when the surging force of imagination mingled nobly and vitally with the freshly developed sense of what could be achieved; finally came the time when a crushing sense of what had been achieved checked and repressed the force of the imaginative outburst. And as the vigor, the health of the olden time declined, we could feel, half insensibly, how the fragment of disintegrating England to which the decadent stage still appealed was strangely without the wholesome, buoyant integrity of the days which were so lately past. The men who welcomed Shirley were of another stripe than their fathers, who had delighted in the full strength of Shakspere.

Turning next to lyric poetry, we found its course similar, but different. Like the drama, it had its period of spontaneous, enthusiastic, versatile Elizabethan integrity. Like the drama, it developed its masters and their manners: Spenser and Jonson and Donne. As was the case with the drama, the very eminence of these masters imposed on later men the conventions, the traditions of achievements and mannerisms not instinctively or freely their own. So came disintegration and much trace of fastidious excess. A sense of limit, too, hung about the later men. Each one, we could feel, addressed himself, not, like the elder poets, to all who might listen, but only to

such as were disposed to respond. Popularity, no doubt, is rarely the lot of any merely lyric utterance. To love poetry other than dramatic, indeed, means that one has a sensitiveness to beauty akin to what we call an ear for music. From its very nature, accordingly, poetry other than dramatic could hardly fall into the kind of corrupt decadence which overtook the drama. So the English lyric followed the course of the drama only to the point of a disintegration where various kinds of poetry stood each clearly apart from the rest—where poetry, in every aspect, was a slighter thing, far less broadly national than any poetry of Elizabeth's time. To this point, accordingly, the course of dramatic poetry and of lyric proved parallel. Both bespoke, so far as literature could, a deep disintegration of national temper—a growing self-consciousness, now fastidious concerning detail, again quickened only by excess of unwholesome stimulant, again still contentedly submitting to the numbness of convention. Whatever else, the world in which we left all poetry alike had outgrown the ardent youthful integrity of the world in which we first found it.

Of chronology, meanwhile, we were perforce careless. And even now it is enough to recall that our first survey of literature attempted to discern the national temper of England as there revealed, in 1600; that our survey of the drama took it from that time to the closing of the theatres, in 1642; and that Herrick's "Hesperides," the last work of lyric poetry

which we have considered, was published in 1648. From Queen Elizabeth's time these swift journeys took us to the verge of the Commonwealth—from an England whence both America and modern England have sprung to one from which the main streams of our trans-Atlantic national life had already begun to diverge. It is on this same period—broadly speaking, the first half of the seventeenth century—that we shall dwell now, as we consider the tendencies of English prose.

Up to 1600, we have seen, the course of English prose had been parallel with that of poetry, but far less conspicuous. In general, writers of prose were stirred, at first, by no artistic impulse. Broadly speaking, their purpose was frankly to translate into terms which should be understood matter which, untranslated, would remain obscure. By a little stretch of meaning that statement may be made to cover not only their avowed translations from foreign tongues into a vernacular English subtly ennobled by memories of the grand rhythm of Latin, but also such expository narrative as one finds in the chronicles, in the records of voyages and adventures, or even in the glowing fervor of Foxe's "Book of Martyrs." Of all the Elizabethan prose which we recalled, only one considerable volume had a really original character; this was Hooker's "Ecclesiastical Polity," a work so nobly conceived and so gently written as to raise controversy for once to literary eminence. Elizabethan

prose, in brief, was mostly a thing of daily use, beautiful and noble in occasional form only because of that marvellous Elizabethan integrity which stamped every expression of the time with its buoyant spirit.

This prose, like the verse which surged above it, was experimental, too. Englishmen had not yet discovered what their language could be made to compass. The poets proved it capable of immortal beauties. The makers of prose, meanwhile, proved it capable of widely various use. Yet, on the whole, they hardly attempted to use it for purely literary purpose. Or rather, when they did so, it was with such fantastic excess of youthful ingenuity as made the novels of Lily first popular and soon, when their brief popularity had faded, inexhaustibly tedious. So far as pure literature goes, this elder time has made no permanent prose record. The prose which has survived from that period has survived because of the fervid, unconscious beauties which, in those full Elizabethan days, proved sometimes inseparable from human expression, even though the conscious purpose of that expression were merely to make something of transitory usefulness. The moment Lily attempted to use prose as a vehicle of fine art, he made only ingeniously pretty experiments, the grace of whose affectations has long withered away. Of all this elder prose, meanwhile, we may assert, even more confidently than we asserted of the elder poetry, that it leaves in memory an impression of fervid integrity, not of individ-

ual achievement. Translations, chronicles, records of adventure, novels and chap-books, controversies, whatever else, group themselves rather together than apart. English prose, to the point where we left it, had never yet risen to anything like the eminence which lyric poetry had attained in the work of Spenser, or which had already crowned dramatic poetry with the superb fragments of Marlowe and with the earlier masterpieces of Shakspere.

So, even if the course of prose in the coming time —the time which saw the decadence of the drama and the disintegration of lyric poetry—had proved precisely parallel with these, its decline would have been far less salient: a great fall must be from some great height. In point of fact, however, though something happened to English prose which may be held analogous to the fortunes of English poetry, there is room for question as to whether the course of prose literature was such as can fairly be brought within the same formula. Though sound critics have sometimes called the tendency of seventeenth-century prose decadent, there seems equal ground for belief that as poetry disintegrated and declined, prose, under the same influences tended to develop new power.

The actual production of English prose between 1600 and 1650 was more than abundant. On the whole, however, the general purpose which underlay it remained so little altered from the purpose which underlay Elizabethan prose itself that this later prose

is mostly of only historical interest. For its own sake, little of it would now be remembered.

This is surely true of the prose left us by the two men who, after Spenser, most deeply stamped their impress on English poetry. The style of the jottings from Ben Jonson's note-books which were posthumously published shows just such mingled mastery of classical spirit and vernacular English as made his dramas bewildering and his lyrics excellent. Here, for example, is his well-known comment on Shakspere:

"I remember, the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing (whatsoever he penned) he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, Would he had blotted a thousand. Which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this, but for their ignorance, who chose that circumstance to commend their friend by, wherein he most faulted; . . . for I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was (indeed) honest, and of an open and free nature; had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions; wherein he flowed with that facility, that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped. *Sufflamminandus erat,* as Augustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so too."

But though Jonson's mastery made him a prose writer of positive merit, he used his prose disdainfully. As an artist, as a master, he kept himself, after

the fashion of his time, a poet; and it was as a poet that he deeply influenced the style of his disciples.

So Donne, in his graver days, wrote sundry works of controversial prose, and left us nearly two hundred sermons; but in spite of the fervor which now and again glows beneath the massive lines, and reveals the same intensity of combined intellect and emotion which gives individuality to his poetry, all his prose has long since sunk beneath the horizon of time. It is memorable, perhaps, in the history of controversy and of English religion; it does not linger in literature. Witness any characteristic bit of it, such as this:

"And let him that is subject to these smaller sins remember, that as a spider builds always where he knows there is the most access and haunt of flies, so the devil that hath cast these light cobwebs into thy heart, knows that that heart is made of vanities and levities; and he that gathers into his treasure whatsoever thou wastest out of thine, how negligent soever thou be, he keeps thy reckoning exactly, and will produce against thee at last as many lascivious glances as shall make up an adultery, as many covetous wishes as shall make up a robbery, as many angry words as shall make up a murder; and thou shalt have dropped and crumbled away thy soul, with as much irrecoverableness as if thou hadst poured it out all at once; and thy merry sins, thy laughing sins, shall grow to be crying sins, even in the ears of God; and though thou drown thy soul here, drop after drop, it shall not

burn spark after spark, but have all the fire, and all at once, and all eternally, in one entire and intense torment."

Sound preaching, if you like, this is not an example of anything like memorable literary art. A similar impression will result from a glance at the most convenient collection of seventeenth century English prose now generally accessible—at one or two of the volumes with which Craik so intelligently supplemented Ward's "English Poets." It is not so much that the men whom he has selected have been quite forgotten as that, on the whole, they are remarkable for other things than this prose for which he has momentarily recalled them to memory. Or if this prose writing be the real reason why they still linger mistily in the sunlight, it has proved thus memorable only by chance. They wrote, no doubt, in a manner different from that of their Elizabethan forerunners; but they agreed with them in using the vehicle of prose not for literary or artistic purpose, but for purposes of instruction, of information, of argument. And if their writings have in some degree survived, it is because, despite their purposes, they used this growing English not only disdainfully, but with a wildly careless power of occasional beauty.

As was the case earlier, there is one clear exception to this last generalization. Euphuism, and the like, we saw to be the single memorable attempt of the elder time to use prose for primarily artistic purpose.

It proved popular, it had deep influence, and it withered like some short-lived flower. In the seventeenth century, or at least in the days of King James and King Charles, there was no writer of literary prose either so salient or so popular as Lily; but there declared itself one variety of deliberately literary prose, practised by a great number of men, which finally had a deep and lasting effect on English literature.

This was the Character-Writing, which persisted, in some degree, throughout the century. It has not yet been minutely studied. Its origin, at least in its fully developed form, is commonly held to be the "Characters" of Theophratus, which became accessible shortly after 1600; the most familiar and excellent example of it in modern literature is the "Caractères" of the French La Bruyère, which did not appear till long after this kind of writing had become traditional in England, though England never produced an example of it so highly finished as his. The course of Character-Writing in England during the first half of the seventeenth century may be broadly indicated by the names of Hall, Overbury, Earle, George Herbert and Fuller.

The fact that Hall was earlier and better known as a maker of formal and conventional satire throws some light on the true nature of English Character-Writing. Elizabethan satire, we have seen, was a paradoxical attempt to express the experience of a renascent world in the terms of a decadent one. Its formal

inspiration, its style, and its temper came chiefly from Juvenal and Martial; yet the facts with which it dealt were those of Elizabethan England—the youthful world from which both America and the British Empire of to-day may trace their origin. The obvious discordance of its vehicle and its substance, accordingly, was perhaps the chief reason why it never flourished so strongly as to be conspicuous in the perspective of three centuries. Of Elizabethan satirists, Hall was among the most noteworthy. Some ten years after his satires were published came his "Characters of Virtues and Vices," returning to the same motive in that vehicle of prose, of which the mood is always apparently contemporary. His characters are conventional, to be sure; but like some more crude Elizabethan ones which preceded them, they have a rough aspect of being conventionalized from life rather than vitalized from convention. And something similar appears in the "Characters" of Sir Thomas Overbury and in the "Microcosmography" of Earle. George Herbert's "Priest to the Temple" carries on the movement, in a deeply characteristic setting forth of what, with his earnest Anglicanism, he conceived to be the ideal of the Christian Ministry; and Fuller's "Holy and Profane State" expresses his conception of those types of conduct which really lead men heavenward or toward the depths.

There is development here, of a kind on which we well might linger, both for its own sake and for the

future which was before it. There can be no question that from these conventional characters of seventeenth-century observation and abstraction came the distinctly individual characters which have done so much to immortalize the essays of the eighteenth century; nor yet that the vital characters of eighteenth century essays were the direct forerunners of that finally vivid characterization which pervades the great period of English fiction. Sir Roger de Coverley sprang from some abstract country gentleman of the elder character-writing; and from Sir Roger de Coverley sprang in turn Parson Adams and Colonel Newcome. But we wander afield. By themselves these elder character-writings, the sole memorable phase of literary prose during the early seventeenth century, never rose to positive eminence. They remain admirably noteworthy chiefly because they mark the course which English literature took on its way from the unreal conventions of Elizabethan satire to the crescent vitality of Addison's essays. And, as we reminded ourselves when we began the considerations now before us, our direct concern is with such monuments of literature as have actually survived.

The same half century which produced this minor prose, however, produced, as we have seen, dramatic poetry, and lyric, too, of lasting excellence. This poetry, with the minor prose, should now be tolerably distinct in our minds. Thus considered, it should serve us a background which should help define our

impression of five permanent prose works, widely different in character, which enriched English literature during these very years: the Authorized Version of the Bible, the works of Bacon, Sir Walter Ralegh's "History of the World," Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy," and the earlier writings of Sir Thomas Browne. On these five we must now dwell, a little while, in turn.

The history of English religion has given the Bible of 1611 so eminently sacred a character that long ago its very syllables had acquired a peculiar holiness. They have had a spiritual efficacy, too, such as might well give color to the faith of these simple believers who have grown, from time to time, to believe that the Englished Word of God resulted from literally verbal inspiration. Biblical phrases have accordingly passed with language into the subconscious depths of our national being until it is less than the truth to assert that no one can earnestly think in English today without, even though all unknowing, an instinctive faith that absolute moral right is embodied in phrase after phrase of English Scripture. These phrases, furthermore, have been so uninterruptedly familiar to all who speak and think and write our language that, quite apart from their sacredness, they have had on the utterances of the generations who have known them far more deep influence than any other words whatsoever. On all this aspect of the Bible we cannot touch now. Our inquiry concerns only its place

in English literature; and of that place there can be no reasonable question. It crowns a period of experimental translations, mostly direct and made by individual men, with a work of slowly developed, composite translation which may fairly be termed the greatest translation in the world.

Translation, we have seen already, is a term which may be stretched to include almost all the achievements of Elizabethan literature. The poets and the dramatists, as well as the men who avowedly rendered into English works from foreign tongues, were chiefly concerned with phrasing in new ways thoughts and emotions, alive with interest and beauty, which they had discovered in a form less satisfactory than that in which they left them. Originality, invention in the modern sense, an Elizabethan never dreamed of. He took what material he found at hand, and dealt with it as he pleased, eager chiefly to make it, in new guise, more intelligible, more alluring, more effective. In general, of course, the poets and the dramatists and the translators, from classical languages or from modern, worked either each by himself or in careless collaboration. In general, all rendered the material with which they dealt into the terms of the moment. So, when the moment passed, those terms became magnificently pristine—no longer, what they had been, stirring examples of the language actually used by living men.

The diuturnity of English Scripture is partly, no

doubt, a matter of its reverend holiness in the eyes of the generations; partly, too, a matter of more cold, dogmatic teaching; but, in no small degree, it is due to the nature of the terms in which that masterpiece of translation was finally phrased. From the earliest times when Sacred Writ was first rendered into English, the men who attempted the task were familiar with Scripture chiefly, if not only, in its Latin form; and the Latinized Scripture of the Catholic Church, whatever its merits as a translation from Hebrew and Greek, possesses superb liturgical rhythm. Open it anywhere, read aloud a few verses, and you will feel for yourselves that marvellous surge and cadence of sound which has echoed, since the days of the Fathers, through the domes and arches of Christian sanctuaries. Something of this cosmic music could not but haunt the memories of those who strove to phrase its burden in terms which should once more be intelligible, as well as stirring, to simple listeners. This rhythm alone would have raised English Scripture to a grandeur above the level of this world, whose daily phrase falls into the rhythm not of the ages, but of transitory time.

Again, the power of our Scriptural language is not only a question of its noble rhythm; it is due almost as much to the purpose which possessed all the generations of translators, that the Word of God should be accessible to all who would hearken. Thus, half unwittingly, the English translators, generation

after generation, strove to render the divine accents of the Church into words which should instantly touch the heads and the hearts of English-speaking humanity.

Among the elder translators animated by this purpose, one is beginning to seem pre-eminent. In the personality of Tyndale, as the records of his life reveal him, there was something which marked him, beyond other men, as the greatest master of this noble double purpose. In his own avowed translations one feels, again and again, not only the rhythm of the centuries, not only the simple language of English mankind, but the glow, too, of such personal fervor as inspires the more conscious utterances of great individual poets. If one might dare generalize, one might venture to guess that, so far as the secret of English Scripture can be analyzed, it may be traced to these three sources: the simple fundamental dialect which all who speak our language can understand; the glorious liturgical rhythm of the Latin Church, and the individual fervor of William Tyndale.

Tyndale they burned for a heretic in King Henry's time, when Wyatt and Surrey were beginning to prune into lyric grace the wild beauties of elder English. And then came the days of King Edward VI., and of Queen Mary, and the great reign of Elizabeth. These very names are enough to remind us of the religious turmoil and strife, of the clashing creeds and theologies, saintlinesses and priestcrafts, through which

England struggled from the past toward the future. Amid these passionate controversies, various versions of English Scripture were made, some tending consciously toward that Calvinism which by and by was to be for a little while fleetingly triumphant, one deliberately striving to express in English the traditional orthodoxy of Rome. Finally, at a moment when English scholarship was more sound than ever before, and when English churchmanship was for a little while more peaceful, a great body of scholarly Englishmen —their names now mostly forgotten—sat them down and made the critical revision of the English Bible which has been accepted by all Protestant England since it finally appeared in 1611.

This very date helps us fix its place in our study. The year 1611, we may recall, was the year before Webster published his preface to the "White Devil," which confessed how the drama was submitting to the bonds of fresh tradition. Shakspere was still at work; Jonson, Dekker, Heywood, Middleton, and Beaumont and Fletcher were at the height of their power. The Spenserian poets—Giles Fletcher and Browne—were in the midst of their work; Chapman had just completed his translation of the "Iliad"; the lyric influence of Jonson and of Donne was fresh in the air. Ralegh, in the Tower, had almost finished the colossal fragment of his great History; and Bacon was preparing to publish that second edition of his essays which added so much to the

first that we may almost consider it as the original. Queen Elizabeth was dead, but the spirit in English literature which we call Elizabethan was at its height. Virginia was just founded; New England was just about to be. These were the surroundings of the men who gave to the English Bible the form which has been found final. Their language had been mastered, and shown to be a vehicle of widely various beauty. In poetry, dramatic and lyric alike, it had proceeded so far that the bonds of new tradition—the consciousness of what the masters had achieved—were beginning to stiffen about it. But prose was still free to surge on, with such momentary unconsciousness of all but its purpose as succeeds an age of experiment and comes before an age where the result of free experiment has imposed new conventions.

The Bible, no doubt, even more than the deliberate stanzas of Spenser, was writ in no language. As we possess it, we find it a revision, made with wonderfully sensitive care for rhythm, of the elder versions which had been growing toward this culmination almost from the days of Wickliffe. What marks it as of its own time is the utterly natural quality of its immortal beauty. In its own way, this composite outgrowth of earnest devout purpose, made at last by so many collaborating hands that one cannot even guess from whom came any single touch of final loving care for word or rhythm, may be held, in mere literature, the ultimate achievement of English prose. Though it

be quite in the dialect of no instant ever known to men, it is full of that spirit which we have so often tried to define as Elizabethan. It is the one final expression, in our prose, of such mastery as results from generations of experiment and precedes generations of newly deadening tradition.

If you would feel this quality, compare any passage from the Authorized New Testament with the Revised Version of it made a few years ago. In our New England, still faintly stirred by the saintly heresies of Channing, modern divines are apt to prefer these more accurate words of Victorian scholarship. They are often more consonant with the Higher Criticism than the Authorized Version appears to be; and so, perhaps, they come a shade nearer what the temper of this passing day fancies to be truth. But as one begins to recognize the loss of beauty which jars on the ear with every fresh discord of that modern strain for accuracy, there comes a crescent sense that, though the revisers sought earnestly for truth, they have strayed from the deeper truth which makes the words and the rhythm of the elder Scripture seem almost literally divine.

It was during the year after the Authorized Version was published—during the year 1612, in which Webster set forth his "White Devil" and in which Shakspere probably ceased writing for the stage—that the second edition of Bacon's essays appeared. The first, published in 1597, had contained only ten

essays; this swelled the number to thirty-eight. It was not until 1625 that the final edition was published, adding twenty more, and reducing the earlier ones to the form in which we commonly read them. Had they never proceeded beyond the state which they had reached in 1612, however, they would still have remained Bacon's principal contribution to English literature.

Without a line of them, no doubt, his name would have been great. His professional career as a lawyer and a statesman was enough to assure him lasting eminence. He had infirmities, of course, which tradition has exaggerated; and the close of his public life was tragically disgraceful. But you have only to read the pages in which Gardiner, the most faithful and scholarly of English historians, has recorded Bacon's legal and political acts and utterances, to feel that these alone would have justified his claim to the admiration of posterity. If Bacon had lived completely apart from the world, meanwhile, his writings as a philosopher—as one who in youth took all knowledge to be his province, and strove unceasingly to reduce it to lawful order—would, by themselves, have won him impregnable fame. He did not, as he had hoped to do, lead the way finally from the confusion of the past to what he believed might be the certainties of the future, but he pointed the way in which those who were afterward to lead must set their faces. Neglecting all this, we might find, in a less familiar

piece of his writing, good reason for holding him a lasting master, even though he had left no other trace; for his brief "History of King Henry VII.," with the making of which he diverted the first months of his disgrace, is an almost classical model, from amid an age of chronicles and legends and controversial mendacities, of what calmly critical history ought finally to be. And yet, if this, too, with his public life and his philosophical leadership, had never been, or had been lost in the recesses of some unrecorded past, the essays—even in the form which they had assumed by 1612—would have secured his memory as a man of letters. Whatever else, they remain what they were from the moment when they first saw the light—the masterpieces of English aphorism.

Throughout Elizabethan literature, in all the enthusiastic spontaneity of its experimental outburst, aphorism had flourished. Though the elder brotherhood of our poets and writers seem, as we saw at first, chiefly makers of phrase, eagerly playing with their newly mastered language, this very play involved something more than words to play with. The saws of Polonius awakened to humorous human vitality a kind of common-sense with which Lily had packed line after line of his ephemeral "Euphues." The difference between this literary aphorism and such native proverbial wisdom as springs, with folk-lore, from the depths of humanity, lies mostly in the consciousness of its ingenuity. A phrase-maker, knowingly at work,

feels moved to make wise phrases; and if he be shrewd and live in times when the world about him is alive with some common impulse, he may swiftly make wise phrases which strike root deep.

With Bacon, in the Essays, the phrase-making impulse of the earlier days had passed into a new phase. As one turns his pages, one feels in them still the full Elizabethan freshness of play with language; but one feels beneath this play a deeper wisdom than anywhere before. He cares for phrase, deeply and carefully; he gives his phrases a turn, an epigrammatic decision, inimitably his own, too; nor do you feel him always so deeply serious that he would stoutly hold this utterance or that impregnable, so long as the turn of it proved impregnably happy. But, for all this, he writes as one who cares more for the substance of his phrases than for their felicitous incisiveness. This man has actually lived, you feel, and has observed life, with a keenness which has really penetrated the surface; he is ready at last to generalize with superb assurance; able, too, partly because of his power, and partly because of the spirit which animates his time, to generalize so wisely that, if we knew less about him and were a little more given than we are to faith in miracles, we might fall to wondering whether such utterances came from a being merely human. Not that they are divine; the wisdom of them is the wisdom of this world; but they are not diabolical, either—they do not whisper such mocking

half truths as should lure believers into sloughs of falsehood. Rather they might seem, in fancy, the playful recreations of some superhuman enchanter—of Prospero, when his robes were laid aside, or of that mediæval Virgil to whose cunning, for so long a while, wondering ignorance was apt to credit the crumbling relics of Roman engineering.

Such achievement bespeaks, as we have just observed, a time spirit, from which the impulse of the individual master can be quickened. These essays were making while Shakspere and his later fellows were at the height of their power—when England, as revealed in literature, was glowing with the final fulness of its Elizabethan life. And Bacon, when that second edition of them appeared, was fifty years old. When, in an eagerly vital age, conscious of the intoxication of crescent existence, a human being, natively shrewd, is grown to the fulness of his maturity, his power of generalizing concerning the facts of experience, as they reveal themselves to a single generation or even on the surface of the generations, seems inexhaustible.

But all this is not absolute truth, nor yet scientific fact. It is only the final utterance of shrewd national empiricism. To reduce to subjection so wide a province as all knowledge, your general must lay his plans with almost divine foresight; and then, the plans laid, he must send ahead his armies of obedient scouts and engineers, to prepare the ways for certain conquest.

It was not Gordon, but Kitchener, who recovered the Nile. And the work of Bacon's which, apart from his statesmanship, he would have held most serious, was inevitably abortive. We have not time to enter into any detail of his philosophy. We can only remind ourselves that he perceived, with all the shrewd certainty which pervades his essays, the cardinal errors of the old scholastic learning; that he pointed out, with the same certainty, how sound and permanent knowledge must rest upon an impregnable basis of ascertained fact; and that he never quite understood how such a basis could be discovered, or secured, only by the patient labors of more generations than have yet elasped since he caught his death-chill stuffing a fowl with snow. So, even though he pointed the way in which the future has travelled and shall travel, the course on which he so boldly started to lead brought him soon to regions shrouded in fresh mists—differing from the mists from which he had emerged only as the mists of morning differ from those which thicken toward sunset.

The "Novum Organum"—the beginning of his magnificent, unfinished work of cosmic philosophy—was published in 1620. Its title-page, which I had not recalled to mind until I turned again to it, as I was writing this passage, may perhaps be the image from which there has grown in my fancy that figure with which we have played more than once—of the Pillars of Hercules, toward which all Elizabethan England

buoyantly voyaged together, in search of the wealthy mysteries of the limitless seas beyond. For, after the quaintly symbolic fashion of its time, this title-page bears on either side two round monolithic columns, doubtless representing those same Pillars of Hercules, which limited the world of antiquity. Between them, on the title-page, surges an extremely tempestuous sea, from which emerge two or three monstrous, big-eyed, fishy heads. Neither waves nor monsters affect the stability of a gallant ship, prudent enough to have housed all but her lower sails. Bellying with the full northeast wind, these are speeding her through the momentary narrows of the straits which connect the seas of the past with the oceans of the future. A desperately grinning whale is scurrying away from across her bows. And just beneath, on a flatly straightened scroll, are the words, "Multi pertransibunt, et augebitur scientia." It is from the book of Daniel: "Many shall run to and fro," the Authorized Version has it, "and knowledge shall be increased." The image and the motto have proved more true than Bacon knew. He led the way to the straits of knowledge; and many have since passed to and fro; but of the number he was hardly one. "Pertransibunt" reads the motto, not "pertransibimus"; yet the most ardent professors of modern science and certain knowledge, still in the heydey of their tireless exploration, are the first to acknowledge the brave leadership of Bacon, whose shrewd wisdom has outlasted his inevitable error.

After all, it is Bacon's aphorism which has won him in literature his most lasting eminence. That Elizabethan world of his had an amazing individual and national integrity. The spirit of it was common to all who breathed its air; nor yet had life begun so to specialize itself, to disintegrate, that a great man need be great only in a single kind of greatness. This chief master of our aphoristic wisdom, this admirable inventor of inimitably positive and assertive English style, was greater still, in his own time, as a lawyer and a statesman and a philosopher. There are few more singular evidences of how this world of ours at once changes and remains unchanging than in the fancies which have lately begun to twine themselves about his memory. Our world has now travelled so far from his pristine and spacious Elizabethan time that none but students of it can quite know how normally Elizabethan was its versatile integrity. Marvelling, accordingly, at all that Bacon was, unscholarly moderns—moderns, it were better to say, unversed in the history of national temper as revealed in literature—have been unwilling to believe that any other man of his time could have approached his range and power. So, just as mediæval legend, recognizing in Virgil the master of Latin poetry, attributed to that same Virgil the mechanical marvels achieved by imperial Rome, so a new modern legend is seeking to attribute to Bacon—statesman, lawyer, philosopher, and master of aphorism—those Shaksperian master-

pieces of the drama which anyone who really knows Elizabethan England must instinctively feel to possess, in common with Bacon's works, only the spirit which made all men of the time Elizabethan.

VII

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROSE

RALEGH, BURTON AND BROWNE

BACON, we have seen, was Elizabethan, like Shakspere; but neither seems quite the most typical Elizabethan of all. In any time there is apt to appear some one figure which proves, in the perspective of history, to embody its spirit beyond all the rest. And among Elizabethan Englishmen the most comprehensively characteristic now seems to have been Sir Walter Ralegh.

A country gentleman by birth, at heart the boldest of adventurers, he had experienced, by the accession of King James, almost every phase of life known to the period. He had been a soldier, a sailor, an explorer, a colonizer; he had been deeply concerned in court intrigues, and in all manner of politics; as a royal favorite he had achieved an enormous degree of personal fortune and influence; he had had his multitudes of followers and of enemies; and he was a poet, meanwhile, who could find time, when he was planning plantations in Ireland, to listen to the manuscript of the "Faerie Queene," and to reward Spenser by reading to him in turn passages from some epic

of his own which has not survived. Whatever region of Elizabethan life you explore, you are sure to find there—loved or hated, as the case may be—the figure or the shadow of Ralegh. Throughout this various, adventurous life of his, a marvellous romantic prototype of what nowadays we call self-made success, he seems all the while to have remained true to one patriotic conviction: namely, that the future prosperity of England depended on the reduction of the world-power of Spain, then at the height from which it has crumbled through three full centuries. So far as relations with Spain went, accordingly, Ralegh was always a consistent man of war. Now King James was at heart a man of peace. In this fact lies a good part of the secret of Ralegh's fall so soon after King James's accession. Within a year or so they committed him to the Tower; and there he remained for twelve years.

Such imprisonment, at that time, was a mere detention of the person. Ralegh was free to see his friends and to busy himself with what studies and the like he chose. It is to these years, accordingly, —to the accident that the most versatile of Elizabethan adventurers was so long kept from public activity—that we owe his great, unfinished "History of the World." This gives him permanent place in English literature. With every aid which the best historical learning of his time could afford, he devoted himself chiefly to composing a universal history.

The purpose and the plan of this work are not only noble, but almost modern in their calm, masterful intelligence. History, Ralegh conceived, is the record of God's purposes, as these are wrought out in the conduct and the fate of men. If we study history, accordingly, with reverent care, it will teach us, with the knowledge of God's purposes, how we ought to conduct ourselves, and incidentally how we shall most surely prosper. His own words are worth recalling:

"Such is the multiplying and extensive virtue of dead earth, and of that breath-giving life which God hath cast upon slime and dust; as that among those that were, of whom we read and hear, and among those that are, whom we see and converse with, every one has received a several picture of face, and every one a diverse picture of mind; every one a form apart, every one a fancy and cogitation differing: there being nothing wherein nature so much triumpheth, as in dissimilitude. . . . And though it hath pleased God to reserve the art of reading men's thoughts to himself; yet, as the fruit tells the name of the tree, so do the outward works of men (so far as their cogitations are acted) give us whereof to guess at the rest."—And history is the record of these outward works of man, themselves tokens of the inner purposes of God.—"It hath triumphed over time, which, besides it, nothing but eternity hath triumphed over. . . . By it we live in the very time when (*the world*) was created; we behold how it was gov-

erned; how it was covered with waters and again re-peopled; how kings and kingdoms have flourished and fallen; and for what virtue and piety God made prosperous, and for what sin and deformity he made wretched, both the one and the other. And it is not the least debt which we owe unto history, that it hath made us acquainted with our dead ancestors; and, out of the depth and darkness of the earth, delivered us their memory and fame. In a word, we may gather out of history a policy no less wise than eternal; by the comparison and application of other men's fore-passed miseries with our own like errors and ill-deservings."

The terms of Ralegh's time were different from those we commonly use to-day. It needs no great effort of mind, however, to translate this grave and noble statement of his purpose as a historian into something which may well be called the highest ideal of philosophic history. Nowadays we are apt to speak and to think of natural law without reference to the infinite sanction behind it; to be content with assurance of how the stars move in their courses without asking why. But as surely as Ralegh discerned in history the record of God's dealings with men, so we to-day regard history as the record of how natural law reveals its working throughout human society. In history, as well as in all science else, the use of facts is that they can finally enable us to generalize with wisdom, and thus to know a little and a little more.

For all the archaism of the terms in which Ralegh set forth his purpose, it accordingly seems evident that his purpose was truly the abiding purpose of philosophic history. To the execution of this purpose he brought an astonishing equipment. He was not, to be sure, deeply trained in the arts of scholarly investigation, but he had at his disposal the assistance of the best scholarship of his day. His own life, meanwhile, had involved a range of experience, public and private, intellectual and emotional, as wide as any human being's can be. This experience, too, he had mastered, in true Elizabethan spirit. No doubt, the career of Ralegh had had its errors, even its rascalities. But he lived before men had begun to dream—as so many do nowadays—that the marriage of principles and conduct in this world can be complete and binding. So, for all his personal shortcomings, he could honestly face his subject with that sustained loftiness of mood and purpose which is one of the secrets of Elizabethan grandeur. With such temper, he brought to bear on the records of the past a critical common-sense, developed to a rare degree by his wonderfully extensive knowledge of actual life. His purpose, his temper, and his merely personal equipment were those of ideal historian.

And yet his great work, though for many years it had deep influence on serious men, has long since become no more than a noble example of seventeenth century style. The reason for this we can instantly see. Glance at his table of contents, to go no further:

you will find him devoting a good part of a chapter to a discussion of whether the tree of knowledge was —or was not—*ficus India;* a little later comes a long consideration of the precise capacity of Noah's Ark, and a far longer one of just where that colossal craft probably grounded. Elizabethan learning was extensive, industrious, widely curious; but it was no more able than that of modern children to distinguish between record and legend. It could make admirable chronicles; and a little later, in Bacon's wonderful "Henry VII.," it proved itself capable of admirable condensation of recent fact, traditional and documentary. But there can be no more final comment on the futility of Ralegh's purpose in his own day than the opinion of many serious modern students who hold such work as Bacon's to be even still a model of all that a wise historian—despite the riches of accessible record to-day—should dare attempt. Even still, many believe, we are not learned enough to philosophize, except perhaps as a pleasantly playful waste of time. More clearly, by far, than the mists in which Bacon's philosophy tended to lose its details, the ultimate failure of Ralegh's history defines at once the aspiration and the limits of Elizabethan learning.

Ralegh's style, the while, had a grandeur and a beauty which make his pages positively admirable. A hasty comparison of it with Bacon's will define them both. Of Henry VII., Bacon writes, in a sentence which one instinctively feels to be deeply character-

istic, this incisively characteristic fact: "He was utterly unwilling (howsoever he gave out) to enter into a war with France. A fame of war he liked well, but not an achievement; for the one he thought would make him richer, and the other poorer." Place beside this the famous passage with which Ralegh's history ends: "It is therefore Death alone that can suddenly make man to know himself. He tells the proud and insolent that they are but abjects, and humbles them at the instant, makes them cry, complain, and repent, yea, even to hate their forepast happiness. He takes account of the rich, and proves him a beggar, a naked beggar, which hath interest in nothing but in the gravel that fills his mouth. He holds a glass before the eyes of the most beautiful, and makes them see therein their deformity and rottenness, and they acknowledge it.

"O eloquent, just, and mighty Death! whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised; thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, *Hic jacet!*"

Ralegh and Bacon were both Elizabethans, but Ralegh's writings—as truly things of their own present as were Bacon's—link him to the past and Bacon's to the future. The quality of Bacon's style—Eliza-

bethan, yet all his own—is that of a marvellous vehicle of precisely apprehended meaning; that of Ralegh's—Elizabethan, too, and yet as deeply, though rather less saliently, individual—bespeaks a nature which could not express itself without a rhythmic ebb and flow which should suffuse meaning with the throbbing strength of half-repressed imaginative fervor. Literally contemporary, both of them, with the Authorized Version of the Bible, they add a new feature to our impression of the period which brought them forth. It was the period, we remember, when the drama was swiftly declining into conventions, and when lyric poetry was beginning to disintegrate under the influences emanating from newly acknowledged masters. English poetry, in brief, had passed the limit of its highest achievement. At this very time, English prose was gaining in range, in power, in variety; but, except in the consecrated words and rhythms of the Bible, which, even in its own day, was writ in no language ever used for the daily intercourse of men, English prose had not yet reached the momentary stability of so fixed a manner as should inevitably impose itself on the writings to come. Here was left more than a trace of the elder freedom, though hardly of the elder unconsciousness. Here, at least, was something which might still grow, might still develop indefinitely before the cramping grasp of convention should stiffen about it.

Thus for an instant touching on the lack of restrain-

ing formal consciousness, we may be tempted to forget the substance of this crescent literature. In the Bible it had achieved the masterpiece of all translation; in the aphorisms of Bacon it had achieved masterpieces of proverbial wisdom. The spirit of the time was friendly to both. When Bacon attempted to subject all knowledge to his rule, on the other hand, and when Ralegh strove to make all history reveal the secret of its laws, both failed; and both failed because each had attempted to make the legendary and uncritical learning of his time serve a purpose for which learning is hardly ripe even to-day. In Bacon's philosophy, accordingly, and in Ralegh's history, one may feel, with all one's admiration, a certain vague dissatisfaction such as springs from a sense that men are striving to do something which cannot be properly done without other material and equipment than they possess. Here are masters, one feels, yet no masterpiece.

In this aspect, Ralegh and Bacon alike throw light on the reason why, a very little later, a man so deeply their inferior as was Robert Burton should have been able to produce a book which, to any man of letters, is on the whole so much more satisfactory, even though so much less admirable, than theirs. Like Bacon and Ralegh, Burton was a man of his time; unlike them, he had no such restless ambition, such versatile impulse of activity, as should urge him, even in imagination, beyond it. A quiet, eccentric, somewhat whimsical scholar, he meddled in no public affairs,

but read, with a queer mixture of childish curiosity and mature persistence, in the endless folios, now long buried beneath the dust of libraries, which included the learning of his time. To him a book was a book, an author an author, a statement a statement, an opinion an opinion. There are few more artless self-revelations in literature than the passage from his "Digression of Air," where, touching on the solar system, he mentions, as of equal authority, the names of Copernicus, Roger Bacon, Patricius, Kepler, Calcagninus, Rotman, Galileo, Lansbergius, Tycho, Ptolemaeus, and Dr. Gilbert. Whatever chanced to interest him, he noted or remembered; as to criticising its value, in any modern sense of the term criticism, the notion never occurred to him.

Such a man might easily have been another Dry-as-dust, adding to libraries only one more such drowsy folio as he had found in them. It is Burton's special grace that he has kept accessible, to all who love reading for its own sake, an inexhaustible treasury of such oddities as without him they would have been compelled laboriously to collect for themselves. In every sense of the word, Burton was humorous. Gravely accepting scholastic physiology, he treated melancholy as a literal humor, which if it got the better of the others in a man would work mischief. Aware of the tendency, inevitably growing in his time, toward no too buoyant a view of life, he set to work on an elaborate, scholastic attempt to ana-

lyze this vexatiously dominant humor, and to ascertain its causes, its nature, its varieties, and the best means of counteracting it. At first sight, his tables of contents look like marvels of dry logical precision. A stranger to the language in which he wrote might intelligently assume his work to be a miracle of system. This pretence to scientific method gives us a glimpse of his humor in the modern sense; for in truth there was never a more whimsical, unexpected hodge-podge than that same "Anatomy of Melancholy." What keeps it so lastingly alive is the actual humor of its details. Burton does not make you laugh; his quaint turns of thought and phrase, however, quietly fantastic, dryly good-natured, constantly unexpected, make him one of the few garrulous writers who never bore you. How seriously he meant himself to be taken is a question hard to answer. The eyes which look at you from his prim, dimpled portrait at Brasenose College smile across the centuries an assurance that if you will let him quietly amuse you with his whimsically learned babble, you need never quarrel with him about graver things.

There were actualities in that world of his, speeding as it was from the buoyant integrity of Elizabethan England to be clashing tragedy of the Civil Wars, on the eve of which, they say, he "sent up his soul to heaven through a noose about his neck"—humorous to the end, in his determination that some astrologic prediction concerning his length of days should not

be falsified. But you might play with the pages of his "Anatomy of Melancholy" till doomsday before you should gather from them any suspicion of the troubles thickening in the air about them. There is no book anywhere which bespeaks more personal isolation—not, to be sure, an ascetic solitude, but a whimsical learned retirement, where you may come whenever you will and listen to queerly pedantic chat; and whence you may go when you like, with a puzzled consciousness of his inscrutable smile, as he watches your departing shoulders. You do not know quite what it all means; you have no reason to believe that he knows any better than you. There is a touch, indeed, of true, lasting melancholy about it all—no hearty laughter, nor buoyant enthusiasm. Yet the air is never darkened by ill-humor, either. In this odd creature's learned solitude, varied and enlivened by his genius for collecting and recollecting all manner of curious fact and fancy, there is an inexhaustible charm.

His style, too, garrulous and amorphous though you so often found it, and saturated throughout with a consciousness of the scholastic Latin in which he was incessantly reading and thinking, proves a singularly true vehicle of his temper. With all its pedantries and whimsicalities, it has the admirable merit of making you feel just as the writer would have you. There is something still contagious in the unpremeditated good-humor of its quaintness. Burton's "Anatomy

of Melancholy," substance and form alike, is really a masterpiece. It does its work finally. It remains, what it was from the beginning, a certain source of delight to all who shall ever love the curiosities of literature.

There have been plenty of literary oddities since his time—of curiosities, deliberately collected and quaintly phrased. That variety of literature is happily inextinguishable. But among all the rest Burton stands, as he stood from the very first, isolated, distinctly alone. And when one asks from what this impression of his excellent individuality arises, the answer is not far to seek. Literary oddity—either in substance or in style, or in both—commonly involves such effort as makes you insensibly suspect that it is in some degree a matter of affectation, or at least of intentional divergence from any generally acknowledged standard. With Burton, you have no such sense. Here, you feel, is a very learned man, who lived in days when learning was a matter of mere acquisition. The world had not yet begun to digest its mental food—to select that which should prove nutritive, to discard that which should prove useless. After all, in those days, a scholar showed deep good sense in trusting instinct—in remembering what amused him, in forgetting or ignoring what failed to do so. When Bacon or Ralegh tried to use such learning as they could command, in earnest, philosophic temper, they only revealed its poverty; when

Burton was content, after the pedantic fashion of his time, merely to collect it in heaps where you can always discover trinkets and fragments which you would never expect to find just there, he did with it the only thing which in his day could be excellently done. So, as you read him, you fall unwittingly into a mood which you shall hardly find elsewhere. And when you try to give yourself acount of this mood, in modern terms, you will be at pains to phrase it more definitely than when you are content to admit it the normal mood of learning in Burton's time.

This primitive learning was an inexhaustible mine of quaint curiosities. These you could range like the specimens in some old-fashioned cabinet, or some child's, where you may find, side by side, a nautilus shell, a Buddhist prayer-wheel, an autograph of John Wilkes, a New England hornbook, and a war-club from the South Seas. It had little relation to actuality; it did not trouble itself to distinguish between Copernicus and Dr. Dee; but, when you chose to accept it for no more than it was, you might always find it indefinitely stimulating to solitary fancy, almost to imagination. Nowadays, if you try thus to set forth learning, your play is poisoned with the knowledge that such busy fruitlessness is nothing but play; what makes Burton's "Anatomy" a masterpiece is that it plays with learning after the manner of childhood, not quite aware and not caring at all whether this be really play or solemn earnest.

Between Burton and the other master of our seventeenth-century prose on whom we agreed to touch, there are obvious points of likeness. Sir Thomas Browne—for to Browne's name has long clung the knighthood conferred on him by King Charles II.—had already published, before 1648, the two works on which his place in literature chiefly rests—"Religio Medici" and his treatise on "Vulgar Errors." In his literary mood these show him to have resembled Burton variously: his temper was essentially solitary, for one thing; he was widely and curiously learned, too; and he was instinctively fond of the oddities and the curiosities which his learning brought to his knowledge. On the other hand, Browne was a professional physician, a trained observer of Nature; and by temperament he was addicted if not to philosophy at least to philosophizing. So he was far from content to bring together in fantastic heaps the cullings of his learning. Whatever he discussed, he discussed in speculative mood. This mood, too, was one of such quietly sustained imaginative fervor that he could not rest content with the language of life to convey its meaning to his readers. Wherever you open his pages, accordingly, you will soon be aware of a deliberate choice of swelling words, of a cunningly contrived rhythmic surge and cadence of sound, which has led many critics, even among those who delight in his beauties, to condemn his conscious rhetoric as decadent.

Decadent in influence so palpably artificial a style may well be. Take the first sentence which chances to meet my eye in the address prefixed to his "Vulgar Errors": "We hope it will not be unconsidered, that we find no open tract or conscious manuduction in this labyrinth, but are ofttimes fain to wander in the America and untravelled parts of truth." The deliberate manner of this, with its conscious latinism of phrase, its thoughtful elaboration of metaphor, its intentionally delicate balance, might easily lead imitators to mannerism. What imitators could not imitate is at once the exquisite felicity of the final figure, and the indefinable touch which excites your instinctive certainty that Browne's emotional purpose could be expressed only by this magniloquent cadence. How else should the simplicity of his lovely phrase appear in all its beauty, than by contrast with the big words just before it, and by the rhythm which brings all the emphasis to itself? It was the saving grace, we saw, of Burton's garrulous pedantry, that nothing else could faithfully set forth his meaning; just such saving grace makes excellent the deliberate rhetoric of Browne.

With him we are come to a later time. The churchmen and scholars who produced the Authorized Version of the Bible had all grown to their maturity in the reign of Queen Elizabeth; so had Ralegh; so had Bacon; so had Burton. But Browne was not born until after Elizabeth was in her grave; and before his

"Religio Medici" was published, thirty-one years after the Authorized Version saw the light, Ralegh and Bacon and Burton were dead. The theatres were closed that same year and the Civil Wars broke out. Browne's solitude, the scholarly and philosophic isolation of his literary mood, accordingly stands in stronger contrast to his surroundings than was the case with Burton. And the deliberation of his gently daring rhetoric becomes the more salient in its contrast with the fierce abandonment of deliberation which was whirling Cavaliers and Puritans alike toward the climax of their tragedy.

This quality of deliberation is what most clearly distinguishes him, the while, from English rhetoricians of earlier times. When Lily made his fantastic phrases and paradoxes, you felt in his work some almost childlike gaiety of experiment; when Sidney wrote the stray lines of his sustained and graceful "Arcadia," you felt that their fantastic beauties were both instinctive and experimental, too; the grave prose of Hooker, with its constant reminiscence of Latin rhythm, was experimental still; and so, in a more masterly way, was the incisive aphorism of Bacon, and the apostrophic dignity of Ralegh. These men, one felt, were, one and all, possessed with a deep sense of their meaning and their purpose; and so was Burton. The effects they produced as makers of prose were such effects as spring from abandonment to the mood of the moment. Now such effects

as those of Sir Thomas Browne are too admirable, too grand, too excellent to spring from any mere intelligence and self-command. Beneath excellent rhetoric, as surely as beneath excellent poetry, there must lurk the true secret of beauty—

> One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,
> Which into words no virtue can digest.

What marks Browne's place in the development of our prose is no lack of this ennobling force. It is rather the fact that this force, as it appears to him, is in a stage where it cannot find due expression without a constantly deliberate care for every syllable which would express it.

"He that hath wife and children," writes Bacon, "hath given hostages to fortune."—"God, whom the wisest men acknowledge to be a power uneffable, and virtue infinite," writes Ralegh, . . . "was and is pleased to make Himself known by the work of the world."—"Divers . . . are cast," writes Burton, "upon this rock of solitariness for want of means, or out of a strong apprehension of some infirmity, disgrace; or through bashfulness, rudeness, simplicity, they cannot apply themselves to other's company." —"For the world," writes Browne, in a passage for once exquisitely simple, "I count it not an inn, but a hospital; and a place not to live, but to die in!"

This deliberation, inseparable from the secret of his gracious dignity, seems to me the characteristic

of Browne which is most significant for us. We might dwell on the critical and gently sceptical temper of his still credulous learning; or on the mystic idealism in which he loved to soar; or, far more still, on the inspiring certainty of his almost limitless rhetorical flights. But when we had said all the rest, we should say again at last that we could not really know him if we suffered ourselves to forget how the secret by which he attained beauty lay no longer in instinctive experiment but rather in deliberate and conscious mastery of language.

We have now glanced at the five monuments of prose with which the first half of the seventeenth century enriched English literature. There was other prose writing during these same years, no doubt; as well as other scholarly work, phrasing itself in scholastic Latin,—such as Napier's treatise on logarithms, and Harvey's on the circulation of the blood,—which might well deserve our attention. But this we may fairly say: apart from what we have considered, the prose writings of those years either have failed to attain a lasting place in literature, or else have proceeded from men whose full position in literature was won by subsequent work, written later. Browne, no doubt, published until almost the end of the Commonwealth; but if he had left us only "Religio Medici" and the treatise on "Vulgar Errors," he would still be the Sir Thomas Browne we know. Fuller and others published well before the Civil Wars. But

if Fuller had done no more he would not have been the real Fuller of English literature; he would have been only a late and fantastic maker of characters and of aphorisms. We should have known the quaintness of his ingenious, conscious, by no means fervid style; but we should not have understood the peculiar quality which makes one remember with his name first the "Worthies of England," next the "Church History," and only afterward what came earlier. Izaak Walton, the while, had published his life of Donne; but the Walton of literature is he who wrote those other pleasant lives, too, and most of all the "Complete Angler." Selden had made his "Mare Clausum," and Chillingworth his "Religion of Protestants"; but both the fantastic claim of international law and the loyal Anglicanism of the cool reasoner belong rather to history than to literature. Jeremy Taylor had begun to write; but he had not yet proved himself the "Shakespeare of Divines." So Hobbes's "Leviathan" and Baxter's "Saint's Rest"—almost literally contemporary—belong rather to later time than to the time we are considering. The actual prose achievement of these days in question—the work which did not exist in 1600 and which was complete when King Charles bowed his head to the axe—was what we have now considered: the final version of the Bible, the works of Bacon, Ralegh, and Burton, and the chief work of Sir Thomas Browne.

During the years when the drama declined and

other poetry disintegrated, we have thus seen, the course of prose was not stationary. In the Authorized Version of the Bible, composite and superhuman as the dialect of it has proved to be, English prose attained what in certain moods one may call its highest excellence. The very sacredness of this work, however, which has so instantly and so permanently raised it above the level of daily life, has made it a thing apart—inimitable. Our other prose, meanwhile, was governed by no such fixed and acknowledged standards as imposed themselves on our poetry. Rather, each writer of prose used his vehicle with a certain high disdain—as a thing no doubt capable of amenity, but not in itself so admirable that one need vex oneself concerning the form of it, if only its terms and its rhythm chanced to serve one's purpose. So no writer, and no school of writing imposed traditions on the freedom of the prose which Bacon wrote, and Ralegh, and Burton. A free servant it remained for whoever had the wit to command it, still flexibly willing to obey.

Then, in the hands of Browne and of Fuller, it began at last to seem unduly fantastic—to lapse from the purity of the elder days; and yet those are perhaps wiser who would hold that the very luxuriance and fantasy of this mid-century rhetoric belongs rather to the untrammelled freedom of elder days than to the graceful bondage of the days soon to come. At least, in that half-century when poetry—dramatic

and lyric alike—had submitted itself to the yoke of convention, prose was still so free that whoever used it might use it unchallenged, however he chose.

In another aspect, the course of this prose had more in common with the course of the other literature which we have considered together. Bacon and Ralegh were great men, busy with the active world, pervasive in the Elizabethan omnipresence of their versatile integrity; Burton was a solitary scholar, Sir Thomas Browne was a gentle and scholarly mystic. Vastly narrower his scope, his range, than that of the elder men; and part of the lasting charm he exerts comes from the mystic idealism with which he constantly sought, in things beyond human ken, personal consolation for the pains which come from the buffets of life. Something similar to this we traced in the course of lyric poetry—disintegrating from the sweet and comprehensive integrity of Spenser to the exquisite and tender trivialities of Herrick, or to those utterances of ecstatic solitude which render so memorable the records of personal devotion during the years when England was torn asunder. And the drama, meanwhile, had faded out of existence.

A loss, then, of national integrity all this literary history shows us. Elizabethans had spoken instinctively to all English-speaking mankind. These later men deliberately uttered, each for himself, phrases which should express or console his own solitude, appealing only to such as would come to share it. Dis-

integration of national temper, it all shows, and such weakening of power as should come from more and more individual isolation.

Had we no other records than these at which we have glanced, the question before us would be puzzling. What had become of the elder fervor? Were these children of Elizabethan fathers all puny, all without the scope, the vigor, the pervasive intensity of the days which so lately had faded from the sunlight?

In fact, as we all know, these days in which literature by itself seems almost calmly eddying, were days when the actualities of English life were at their fiercest. The struggle of the mid-century, religious and political alike, has left surprisingly few traces in permanent literature. One is tempted, indeed, boldly to assert that it has left hardly any literary record at all. None the less, we can in nowise understand the period we are considering together, without reminding ourselves of its deepest and noblest passions. On them—on the conflicts which burst into the storms of Civil War—we must touch for a while. Even though this consideration take us away from pure literature into the domain of history, we cannot understand without it what the literature we are studying truly signifies concerning the national temper we are striving to define.

VIII

THE EARLIER PURITANISM

We have now traced the general course of English literature during the first half of the seventeenth century. In 1600, we saw, this literature was in the full height of its Elizabethan power. It had developed its wonderful school of drama; it had perfected its peculiar and beautiful kind of pristine lyric poetry; it had proved our language, meanwhile, capable of noble and varied effects in prose. Throughout, in brief, literature bespoke the spontaneous, enthusiastic, versatile temper of Elizabethan England—above all, its peculiar national integrity. Somehow, to a degree rarely felt in human history, all Elizabethans seem brethren.

From this point we have followed the separate course of the three chief kinds of literature, the drama, lyric and other poetry, and prose. The drama we found to present a remarkably complete example of literary and artistic evolution; it broke from its old conventions into a spontaneous freedom which for a little while seemed limitless. Very soon, various masters, with their varying tendencies, began to impose on it their new conventions. Partly in obedience to these

conventions it sank toward lifelessness; partly, perhaps, in futile struggle against them, it ran to rank excess. In all aspects it declined, until the closing of the theatres in 1642 may be likened to the sealing of some tomb. Turning to the course of other poetry during the same years, we found it similar, but not identical. Under the influence of three distinct and powerful masters—Spenser, Jonson, and Donne—the tendency of lyric style grew no longer experimental, but rather conventionally imitative; and a school of poetry which in Elizabethan days was superbly comprehensive became, during the time of King Charles I., fastidiously specialized, tending either toward excessive mannerism or toward deliberate reaction in the direction of a conscious and somewhat affected simplicity. So far as the later work has lasted, it has lasted because of the excellence with which its extreme refinement expresses the qualities of individuals—Herrick, for example, and the religious poets. Turning finally to prose, we found once more something similar, with a marked difference. In style, at least, Elizabethan prose never developed into such dominant conventions as forced decline on the drama, and as emphasized the disintegration of other poetry. With all its comparative freedom of form, however, which persisted while poetry was stiffening into formality, prose, in substance, followed the same course which lyric poetry took. The prose of the early days seems national. In comparison with it the

prose of the later time—Burton's, for example, or Sir Thomas Browne's—seems deliberately individual.

In few words, if we can sum up what all this literature has revealed of national temper, we may say that it indicates a period when the elder integral temper—with its spontaneity, its enthusiasm, and its versatility—swiftly disintegrated; a period, too, when this process of disintegration tended to produce writers who seem increasingly self-conscious, and consequently more and more deliberate; and that, so far as its later manifestations reach the lasting dignity of literature, they reach it not because they express, like Elizabethan literature, a comprehensive national temper, but rather because, more subtly than that elder literature, they express the individual experience of men, mostly given to ideal philosophy, who sought, or who were driven into, personal isolation.

Had we no other records of this half-century than these literary ones—the chief literature which, during this time, reached completion—we might well infer that the national temper of the moment was not only disintegrant, but completely decadent. And glancing newly at the surface of these records we might well fancy that one phase of its disintegrant decadence was a decline of the emotional power, of the passionate fervor which everywhere animates the writings of true Elizabethan days. An interval of cooling temper we might well guess the later time, as we remember the fading copies of the later dramatists or the harshening

stanzas of the Spenserians, or the pretty trivialities of the Sons of Ben, or the quaint isolation of Burton, or the gentle rhapsodies of Sir Thomas Browne.

And yet in truth, as we all know; that very period was the most fiercely passionate in the whole history of modern England. In religion, and in politics alike, historic forces were at work vastly beyond any human control for the moment; and these forces, seizing on men despite themselves, whirling them onward no one could tell whither, stirred the nation to depths beyond any which the passions of the past had moved. And from this commotion arose the great tragedy of the Civil Wars. And from the bewildering storms of these there emerged, in the end, an England historically in another state than that from which the outbreak had torn it.

When the chief revolution of later times occurred —the great Revolution of France—it was preceded by a generation or more of literature in which we can trace its growth. With this literature familiarly in mind, the literature of seventeenth-century England seems strangely separate from its history. How wide the separation really was may be inferred from the slenderness of allusion to literary matters in the wonderful history of Professor Gardiner. He has much to say of Bacon, no doubt, and of Ralegh; but very little of their writings which persist in literature. And of all the dramatists he cites hardly any but Massinger, in some of whose later plays there are

obvious comments on the foreign diplomacy of King James I. In these literary conferences of ours, we have been able to consider the literature of England, under King James and King Charles, almost as if the period had been blest with lack of history; and Professor Gardiner was able to write the history of that stirring time with marvellous comprehensiveness and fidelity, almost as if the time had lacked a literature. There are printed books, no doubt, enough and to spare,—pamphlets and broadsides, too, by the thousand—which set forth, in controversy, the rising contentions of the times; and there are records of the debates which so admirably foreran the parliamentary eloquence of the century to follow. But, so far as lasting literature goes, it is surprising that neither English poetry nor English prose tell enough of the absorbing passions which distracted the nation even to suggest their existence to anyone who did not otherwise suspect it. From what we have considered, indeed, we could infer concerning national temper little beyond a swift disintegration of what had seemed astonishingly integral, and—along with this national disintegration—a tendency, both in lyric poetry and in prose, to the quickening of individual consciousness.

Both of these characteristics are doubtless true; but they are so far from comprehending the situation that they can afford us little help in the confusion into

which the history of these years plunges any student. There are few historical periods which seem, as one tries to understand them, more bewildering. To comment on that stormy time at all is, in a way, presumptuous. Clearly, however, we can in no wise fulfil our purpose together without some attempt to summarize those passionate and conflicting years. It is clear, furthermore, that the historical fact which they most surely involved was the temporary dominance in England of what we may broadly call Puritanism. Elizabethan Puritanism, as we remarked long ago, was singularly inarticulate in literature; it left hardly any trace on the lasting surface of Elizabethan letters. Something very similar is true of Puritanism during the years which came between the death of Queen Elizabeth and the Commonwealth. Yet the national temper of this period was immensely influenced by the temper of the Puritans. To them, accordingly, we must devote ourselves chiefly for a while.

In a way, the whole history of Puritanism may perhaps be less puzzling to Americans than to Englishmen themselves. For, as everyone knows, the settlement of New England, from which so great a part of our native American temper has sprung, was deeply impregnated with the elder Puritan ideals. And, although the course of time has gone far to modify these, it has never yet gone so far as to obliterate them from the New England conscience. To any New Englander of to-day, accordingly, the general

accounts of Puritanism in England, and indeed of Puritanism by Englishmen, are apt to seem a little blind, or at least a little wanting in the matter of sympathetic insight.

By the time when our proper consideration of the Puritan character begins—at the dawn of the seventeenth century—the Reformation had done its political work in severing England from communion with Rome, and in establishing throughout the country a deeply rooted Protestant tradition. To a great degree, no doubt, this tradition may be traced to deliberately political causes. The story of the Reformation in England is so complicated that, in different moods, men have been tempted to simplify it in various ways which neglect its spiritual side. An economic fact, for example, it has been lately called, as if it were all explicable when we discern how much less costly it made the saving of souls. In earlier times men who sought salvation had been directed to seek it by means of an immensely elaborate and increasingly expensive ecclesiastical machine; when a book, which anyone could buy, or even could read without the expense of purchase, was substituted for this, the positive economy of the reformed method confirmed the thrifty in their eager conviction of its absolute truth and efficacy. Again, the personal passions of King Henry VIII. have been credited with more than their due in the matter; and so, perhaps, has the international aspect of Protes-

tantism in Queen Elizabeth's time, when the world-contest with Spain made imperative every expedient which could stimulate anti-Catholic prejudice among Englishmen. These were the days when Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" was chained to reading-desks in English churches; and chained so fast, too, that its honestly malignant and distorted pages excite, to this day, much of the traditional horror of Catholicism, which still haunts extreme Protestants on both sides of the sea. This Protestant force, to be sure, was not all Puritan. In King Charles's time, they read Foxe's "Martyrs" at Little Gidding, as eagerly as the New England emigrants read it at Boston or at Plymouth. But the Protestant propaganda tended, on the whole, to foster the spirit of Puritanism.

And this Puritan spirit, deeply as it became complicated with politics and other affairs of this world, cannot be understood unless we penetrate beneath its ungainly and repellent surface. What gave it such vitality was not the aspect which it presented to external observers. For, from the beginning, the true Puritans were men whom the complicated forces set free by the Reformation, stirred, in the depths of their spirits, with such new realization of spiritual life as those who experience it are apt to call regeneration.

Even in individuals, the while, and still more in society, the deeper religious experience of Elizabethan

times had been apt to hide itself a little beneath the surface. Here lies one reason why the literature of those days tells us so little of it. Courtiers and playwrights, soldiers and adventurers, even statesmen and churchmen were mostly concerned with the busy and absorbing affairs of this world. In those days, as always before and since, men who tended passionately to care chiefly for other worlds than this were apt to be men whom this world either neglected or oppressed. Of course, this is not absolutely true: "Though it hath pleased God," writes Ralegh, the most daring and unscrupulous of Elizabethan adventurers, "to reserve the art of reading men's thoughts to Himself; yet, as the fruit tells the name of the tree, so do the outward works of men (so far as their cogitations are acted) give us whereof to guess at the rest." As one ponders on phrases like this, one grows to feel even in that far from Puritan adventurer, whose energies were so utterly devoted to worldly matters, a certain simplicity of faith which makes his naming of God something else than cant. But that world which Ralegh found so fit a field for his struggles and conquests was, in truth, a very evil world—full of sin, of intrigue, of trouble, of baseness. And men like Ralegh, whose energies were given to its business, were generally far from such devout realization of worldly vanity as compels those who seek consolation to seek it in regions where truth must swim and quiver forever beyond human ken.

The Puritan spirit of the earlier days was of another stripe. Whatever external form it chanced to assume, the men whom it animated felt beyond all things else the monstrous evil of earthly life; and, loosed, for better or worse, from the old consoling authority of the united Catholic Church, they were forced to seek for themselves the everlasting Truth which should explain and atone for the sins of mankind. Truth they could no longer discern in the traditions and the mystical rites of Rome; to the Puritans these seemed diabolical corruption. The teachers of the Reformation proclaimed instead that truth was all to be found in the words of the Bible. But these words, taken by themselves, proved—for all their power and beauty—not quite within the comprehension of unguided readers. Truth though they were they needed interpretation. So came an eager interest in the preaching which began to flourish so luxuriantly. And this preaching, on the whole, tended more and more to emphasize that system of Protestant theology which showed itself at the time, as it has so often shown itself since, most congenial to the earnest temper of English-speaking seekers for salvation.

The system, in brief, was that of Calvin. It is full of technicalities, no doubt; and the points of it which have been matters of such heart-burning discussion need not detain us now. Yet Calvinism, in outline, we cannot neglect; for unfailing faith in its

broad tenets was the basis of all Puritan character. Without keeping the outlines of Calvinism in mind, accordingly, no man can understand either the origin and growth of our New England across seas, or the spiritual force which impelled the mother country to all the horrors of the Civil Wars. And there are few more surprising facts than the neglect of this simple matter by almost all the formal historians who, from that day to this, have touched on the period with which we are concerned together. It is hard to find anywhere a compact, historic statement of what the Puritans believed.

In brief, their creed was something like this: We can learn from Scripture that God created man, in His image, with absolute freedom of will. Adam chose to exert his will in contradiction to that of God. In punishment for this, God's unbending justice forbade that the human will, either in Adam or in his posterity, should thenceforth harmonize with the Divine. Humanity had made its evil choice; it must bear the unending penalty; for contradiction of God's will is clearly the deadliest of sin. So all men were doomed. But presently came the mercy of God, to mitigate His justice; and through the sacrifice of Christ, this mercy offered to certain human beings, chosen no man could tell by what impulse of Divine pleasure, the unspeakable grace of unmerited salvation. These were the elect,—that little company of saints whom Divine grace had freed from the penalty of sin, ances-

tral and personal. Now the essential feature of this penalty, imposed in Eden on all children of the Fall, was that no one who suffered under it—and those who so suffered comprised the whole human race—could truly exercise his will in harmony with the will of God. The proof, and the only proof, of freedom from this penalty was accordingly the discovery that, with Divine aid, a human being could feel his own will miraculously harmonious with God's. If such feeling could persist, if it proved durable, it was almost an assurance to the individual who experienced it that he was among the blessed few destined for salvation.

Yet no wile of the devil was more incessant than that which lulled souls into false security by delusive mimicry of this Divine reconciliation. To whom God might choose to grant His grace no man could tell. There was always a chance that anyone might find himself of the elect; there was always a chance, as well, that the most prolonged assurance of this blessing might prove in the end delusive.

The natural result of these grim convictions presently ensued. At heart, the typical Puritan became one whose whole spiritual life was passed in eager, intense effort, renewed day by day, to discover whether it was indeed possible for his errant human will to work in true consonance with the will of God. If so, he was saved; and all earthly interests shrunk into the insignificance of earth—a mere point in the infinite expanse and duration of eternity. If not, why, earthly

matters mattered little, either; for whatever fleeting joys or grandeurs might mitigate the vexations of this twinkling instant of human wakefulness, the eternity of woe to come made them meaningless.

It is not that any or all of the Puritans, early or late, would unhesitatingly have accepted so simple a statement of the dogmatic faith which they cherished. Humanity is too complex, and their grim theologies were too deeply involved with human complexity, to admit of a simplification which shall comprehend the details of their orthodox heresies. But it is only when you keep in mind some such sense of the heart of Calvinism as my brief statement has tried to awaken that you can begin to understand what Puritanism meant, and what it uttered, and what it accomplished.

Passing, for a moment, from the theological aspect of Calvinism, we may find in its insistence on the infrequency of salvation, one deep secret of its lasting power. Any creed, to live, must accord with the facts of human experience; or at least must not flatly contradict them. At first sight, the transcendental dogmas of the Puritans may seem as remote from the actualities of life as were the heavens or the hells where they were held to work themselves out. But look at life as one may see it in any complicated society—such as that in which we live, or as that which surrounded Calvin's Geneva, or as that which passed from Queen Elizabeth's sovereignty to the sovereignty

of the Stuarts. An evil thing, this life, with its sins and its sorrows, its pains and its basenesses, its idolatries and its superstitions; till there is consolation for the loss of little children when we reverently remember the knowledge which has been spared them. And it is not only to the righteous that this struggling, vexatious world must seem a hollow and a tragic thing. Even among those who are content to yield themselves to earthly ideals, seeking only vanities which death must take from their grasp, all but a few must fail. There is struggle everywhere for existence; and only the fittest few can ever survive. So in terms which are themselves beginning to stiffen into cant, we moderns have attempted to generalize into the simplicity of comprehensible truth the complexities which bewilder each fresh gazer on the phenomena of human existence. And thus generalizing, we find ourselves, when we stop to consider what we mean, almost at one with the Puritans after all. They phrased their theologies in the mystic terms of other worlds than ours; their depravity and their election were matters of God's justice and grace, not of what we call the laws of Nature. Yet the facts on which these dogmas were really based are just the facts which we call the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest. Throughout Nature, if one organism shall live myriads must perish. And one deep reason for the tenacity of Calvinism lies in the certainty that as you strip it

of its technicalities and its mysticisms, it proves more and more to accord with the processes of earthly life as these reveal themselves to the cool scrutiny of science.

Again, besides this rather noble appeal to the reverence for truth which resides in our higher human nature, the Calvinism of the Puritans appealed, more subtly still, to an insidious weakness of humanity. When New England, in Channing's time, yielded itself for a while to the cheerful optimism of the Unitarians, those who stayed loyal to ancestral Calvinism, with heroic disregard of the small worldly prizes they might otherwise have hoped for, were accustomed to console themselves by pious contemplation of what would happen, in eternity, to the buoyant and prosperous heretics who had everything their own way in transcendental Boston. What was thus surely true of Yankee Puritanism in its decline was probably true of Puritanism throughout. It always had a singular power of comforting people who had failed to prosper on earth and were disposed to envy those who had succeeded; for if amid the most humiliating misfortune, or the deepest personal obscurity, a man could honestly feel himself assured of salvation, he could look with a grim humor at the passing pageant and triumph of those whose infernal sufferings should presently and permanently enhance his saintly joy.

Puritanism thus made appeal both to the strength and to the weakness of human nature. It laid meanwhile extraordinary stress on personal experience of

religion. The systems which base themselves on ecclesiastical authority naturally tend toward a certain external formalism, attributing to their rites a positive efficacy with which, indeed, those rites often seem to edify the faithful. But if your faith, on the other hand, hold that you can be saved only by the unmerited, capricious grace of God, and that you can be assured of this only by knowledge that you can miraculously use your human will in utter harmony with the infinite will of His divinity, the higher you rise in your ecstatic contemplation of His will and His grace, the less you care for distracting rites, which after all—in their visible aspect—are only a particularly delusive kind of fleeting earthly vanity. So at first you are indifferent to ecclesiastical forms or even churchly control; and then, if this control prove galling, you spurn it. Nothing human shall be suffered to stand between you and the absolute will of God.

But how shall you be assured that what you deem God's will is no delusion? By searching Scripture, of course; by saturating yourself in the Spirit of the Word of God, wherein is divinely revealed, if not all truth, at least every ray of truth which is essential to salvation. The visible Scripture is only a letter—another human fact; but beneath this letter lies the Spirit. Except by Divine grace, no doubt, the Spirit will not reveal itself at once; the letter is a human veil, quivering filmy between the seeking believers and the truth they seek. But persevere; strain every

faculty to understand assuredly the infinite and Divine meaning which the sacred words dimly shadow forth. And by and by, with ineffable irradiation, you shall find yourself suddenly snatched up unawares into the realms where Truth shines changeless above the mists and the errors of this frail and fleeting Time.

Yet even here the devil may play you false. How shall you be assured that even your most devout ecstasy is not only fresh delusion, more deeply diabolical than ever, for its very likeness to holiness? Here, surely, the Puritans felt, the rites and the mummeries with which the superstition of the ages has smothered what sparks of truth once strove to glow beneath them can serve you less than little. Your effort is to bring yourself, from amid all the fatal perversity and weakness of corrupt humanity, to regions where that will of yours, distorted by the sin of Adam, may once more miraculously find itself in everlasting accord with the unbending and unending purposes of God. From God Adam fell away in innocence; what shall his poor children do in this age of villainy? First of all, they must free themselves from all the bonds and the delusions of earth, fixing their eyes only on those regions—beyond the vision of mere humanity, whether alone or banded in blind and errant churches —where, with God Himself, rejoicing in His justice, adoring the miracle of His mercy, the saints may look down on the shadows from which none but their blessed company may ever emerge.

And this hallowed company of the saints is itself a mystic brotherhood. The accordance of their regenerate spirits with the spirit of their Creator and their Preserver brings them into immortal harmony not only with Him but also with one another. The saints, and those who aspire, hopefully or despairingly, to their glorious fellowship, may speak to one another, and listen, and begin to understand. It is the spirit of the saints which can truly interpret Scripture—the spirit of the saints breathed through their own lips, or through the lips of others who, even though lost, are content to repeat the messages which they reverently adore, even though they may not share the ineffable joy of spiritual communion with the God from Whom they come. The Book of Life contains the Living Word; but to reach the heights from which we can really perceive how the pages burn with the mystic and immortal fervors of their inner meaning, we must be guided by the spoken words of those whose spirits are already bathed in the purifying fires of God's mercy.

Again, we stray perhaps, to phrases and even to thoughts and moods which the Puritans would never have quite acknowledged as their own. Yet some such temper as must underlie the thoughts and the moods of devotion which we have just striven sympathetically to awaken seems beyond doubt to have animated the whole Puritan world. Sympathizing with it, accordingly, even though we forget the terms in

which amid errors of our own we have attempted to phrase it, we can hardly fail sympathetically to understand why the Puritans, in their worship, precisely reversed the traditional opinion and practice of Catholicism. To the traditional Church, the essence of worship lay in observance of the consecrated and mystic rites by which God had bidden His ministers symbolize to humanity the infinite mysteries of His truth. And those served God best who were rewarded for their faithfulness by a sense of their fellowship in holy sacrament with the vast body of His servants who throughout the Christian centuries have composed the visible Church. There was always Catholic preaching, no doubt; but this preaching was a secondary matter. You might listen or not as you preferred. The preacher, if he were faithful, spoke not for himself, but for the Church of which he was an officer; and the soul of his office lay not in his words but in his ministrations. Accept these, and let his words be what they might. Indeed, if you were so disposed, you might even doubt the wisdom of listening to any preacher whomsoever; for, at best, preachers were only men, who might yield to vain temptations, and speak not what the Church taught, but what their erring selves chose to fancy. Abandon yourself to the blessed mysteries of sacrament, then, and let preaching hold its minor place if it would. You need no sermons to guide you heavenward; rather, at best, sermons are earthly edifications.

To the Puritans, on the other hand, preaching was all in all. From the lips of sanctified divines could come, as from no other conduits, the living spirit of God; and every form or device was a blinding evil, which should distract attention from the words of the preacher to the ceremonies of the minister. Distracting they found even the comparative lifelessness of a formal ritual, as contrasted with the fervor of new-made prayer; distracting, too, they found the attitudes of reverence which had been deadened into formalism by ancestral custom; more distracting still they found the pageantry of vestments, and altars and painted glass, and even the glorious music of organs and chants which, however inspiring, filled their ears with nothing higher than the momentary harmonies of this sinful earth.

Nor was it only as a distraction from the efficacies of preaching that the Puritans distrusted and condemned those forms in which the Anglican authorities and worshippers of King Charles's time discerned only the beauty of holiness. This very beauty of earthly holiness, the Puritans felt, might well dim over eyes to the unspeakably greater beauty of that holiness which shines beyond the mists of earth. These Puritans have often been declared by posterity to have lacked imagination. In the years when all the wealth of Elizabethan literature, and the literature we have glanced at since, enriched our world; in the years when, whatever its errors and its vices, the surface of

English life glowed with a pageant-like brilliancy which has hardly been shadowed in later times, the Puritans, plain in dress, severe in aspect, often rude of phrase, produced—at least in so characteristic a form that we can assert it all and only theirs—little other lasting utterance than endless, acrid, crabbed sermons, or pamphlets, or books of controversy. To understand how these men, even in imagination, too, were brethren of the generation which, in other ways, added most of all during those before us to the imaginative wealth of our common race, needs nowadays an effort of imagination in ourselves.

It is hard to wrest ourselves from this twentieth century to the regions where the Puritan forefathers of New England found themselves three hundred years ago. It is hard to understand that the most ardent imagination—like the most soaring ambition—often lacks the aspect by which we recognize the quality in its lesser form. But make the effort yourself, to-day; yield yourself for the instant to the mood, which, a little while ago, we were striving to revive together. Figure to yourself that every energy of your being is consciously, painfully, ardently devoted to an effort to assure yourself that your will is at one with that of God. Stop, then, for an instant. Reflect, as you contemplate that effort, how in essence it is an attempt to realize in terms of the human mind the infinite glories of unfathomable Divinity. Reflect how deeply, how

immutably this purpose must transcend any human power which strives to accomplish it. Understand how that elder race of Puritans knew their human weakness as well as you know yours; but how they hoped, against despair, that God's miraculous mercy would grant, to one or to another, the ineffable mystery of His all-seeing grace. And you shall feel, by and by, how all the imaginative power of our most imaginative elder time could lose itself unperceived in this illimitable aspiration; leaving for the sight of men only an exterior which seemed utterly to lack that imaginative life whose utmost powers were exhausted by the unspeakable passions of the spirit. There are few more wonderful experiences possible than that which will come to you if you have patience to pore over some musty, crabbed Puritan sermon until the words begin to swim, and their meaning to fade even beyond its harsh obscurities, and, of a sudden, you are aware that this is only another daring, futile, fleeting effort to express in the passing terms of earth an ecstatic sense of the eternal mysteries above—those mysteries amid whose glories the spirits of the saints may triumphantly and securely emerge from the errors and distortions of corrupt human will into everlasting communion with the vast justice and mercy of Omnipotence.

We need not marvel that no works of art came from these men. The unspeakable magnitude of their awakened spiritual purpose caused them

instinctively, as well as deliberately, to distrust, to disdain, to condemn the distracting trivialties of earthly beauty, fading at its noblest like the flowers with which it decked its passing pageants. Like the lesser pageants and vanities,—like the courts, and the play-houses, and all the rest,—the very beauty of earthly holiness, in the formal ceremonies of whatever creed, seemed to the Puritans only obstacles embarrassing the vision which would lose itself in ecstatic contemplation of the glories which no time nor circumstance can ever change or end.

This intense, transcendental idealism surely underlay the grotesque, uncouth exterior of the elder Puritans; and vitalized the spirit which was to grow so sturdily during the years when it made so little mark on literature. Essentially heretical, in the sense that it threw on each man who accepted its teaching the duty and the responsibility of free spiritual choice, this spirit was doomed to clash with any severe or formal assertion of spiritual authority. For a while ecclesiastical control of it was not oppressive; yet there was never quite such freedom from this as should suffer it, like unopposed heresy, to evaporate into individual vagary. And, as the generations began to pass, and Puritanism itself began to be a new tradition, with its own dogmas and its own worthies, its own orthodoxies and solidarities, there began to arise, or at least to define itself, that Anglican opposition to it which was as honest as itself.

As this tendency increased, and moved fatally toward its acme in the tragically futile efforts of Archbishop Laud to make the whole English church conform in the beauty of holiness, the dogmas of Puritanism hardened into freshly aggressive uncouthness. Then there arose inevitably, in the spiritual life of England, one of those deep mutual misunderstandings which must always underlie honest warfare. Good men, in this world, seek righteousness; but their paths are divers; and when two have travelled long apart, and look at one another from afar, each seems to the other bound for perdition. Neither can discern, or will stop to remember, the purpose which they hold in common. Both are blinded by the perception that their paths are parted. And so, when the troubles began to thicken, the Anglicans seemed to the Puritans harking back to the enslaving and damnable superstitions of ancestral Rome; and to the Anglicans the Puritans seemed little but pragmatic and turbulent anarchists.

By this time we have strayed far from all precise fact, and very far from precise chronology. In such generalizations as have been forced upon us, there is deep danger of unmeaning and misleading vagueness. Yet, if we reflect, we shall perceive that, to this moment, we have considered Puritanism only in its inner and spiritual aspect. Throughout its course, it surely had another; its nature was one which must meddle with the conduct of this world. If the deepest

conviction of your being become a belief that your erring human will has been brought miraculously into harmony with the will of God, the Ruler of the Universe, you cannot be indifferent to the conduct of God's creatures, your fellow-men. And so, now and again, the Puritans openly attacked the ungodly vagaries of other than themselves—the earthly splendors and pretensions of prelacy, for example; the vanities and corruption of those growing centres of sin, the public theatres; the distracting wickedness of health-drinking, and of love-locks; and whatever else. But, at first and for long, the Puritans were not apt to forget the Divine injunction that men are to render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's. They were eager, as few other companies in history have ever been, that life, in all its earthly aspects, should obey the dictates of duty—of everlasting right. But they were willing to admit on the earth the potency of those rights by which ancestral law had directed the course of history.

Yet there could be no doubt that something like established law supported the crescent assertion of ecclesiastical power which strove to suppress the uncouth outward manifestations of their ineffable inward fervor. So when the authority of the Church in which they still claimed membership bade them observe the external decorum which they had conscientiously disdained, a question arose which went deeper than any man quite foresaw. The question

at first seemed one of surplices and of genuflexions, of reverenced altars or communion tables ostentatiously used for secular purposes, of printed liturgies or prayers and sermons which should breathe the inspiration of the individually devout elect of God. But to the Puritans it soon became rather a question of how, if at all, the right they were divinely bidden to follow could be brought into accord with the rights to which ancestral law had limited their earthly privileges as Englishmen.

Dangerous though catch-words be, it will repay us to remember these two: right and rights. Right is an obligation sanctioned by duty and by ideal justice, springing from the heavens above; rights are privileges and duties assured mankind by the human laws under which they live. Right is divinely abstract; rights are humanly concrete. And in earthly affairs, the two can seldom quite coincide. Again and again, throughout history, there have accordingly come efforts to reform human affairs in accordance with abstract ideals—to impose on the distortions or the errors of rights, as defined by the passing and various systems of human law, the higher authority of ideal right. Sometimes these efforts are merely reforms; sometimes they are revolutions. Almost always they subtly and unexpectedly alter the course of society and thus affect the development of national temper. They hardly ever accomplish precisely what they so eagerly and fervently believe that they shall;

for though right be divine in its ideal origin, the phrasing of its dictates in human terms is sure to dim its purity; and although rights, in epochs of aberration and oppression, be never so distorted, they surely have their origin in centuries of experience which has proved them favorable to human safety and prosperity. In a way, one may assert, the noblest aspiration of practical politics is that right and rights may be made, as nearly as possible, to agree. Both must always exist; both must always be recognized; neither may safely be suffered quite to prevail over the other. Those epochs are happiest, they say, which have no history; another way of phrasing this meaning were to assert those epochs most happy when for a little while the ideals of right and the state of rights are enough at peace to leave men free in their individual courses toward wealth and righteousness.

Now, when Puritanism, in the early years of the seventeenth century, found its ideal of right more and more at odds with so many of the rights which, at least formally, were asserted by the civil and ecclesiastical law of England, there came to it a deep question. Just then, even though Puritanism had possessed the unity and the force demanded for organized resistance, the time was not ripe for the Civil Wars so soon to come. Yet the Puritans could not conscientiously yield to the authority which, misunderstood and misunderstanding, was doing its utmost to curb them. The moment might consequently have been

expected to produce, at least in controversy, some passionate literary assertion of Puritanism,—of determination that when right and rights clash, right must prevail,—which should have emerged into the lasting eminence of literature. For such a document, I think, we may search English literature, at least before Milton's time, in vain. But the very columns in which the chronology of English literature is anywhere recorded would reveal, at precisely this period, a fact in history, trivial in seeming at the moment but incalculable in its consequence, which, without undue fantasy, we may call the true national expression of Elizabethan Puritanism.

In the days which are now in our minds, the seventeenth century was still in its late youth, and as yet Puritanism had made no literary record of its passionate intensity. But remember two simple facts: Queen Elizabeth died in 1603. Before 1630 the Pilgrims of Plymouth and the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay had planted their colonies. An instant of reflection will assure us of one fact which those mere dates irrefutably imply. Every man of mature years in those emigrant companies of ancestral Americans had been born in the integral and spacious days of the great Queen. Every one of them was literally one who, in other than Puritan paths of English life, might have mingled with the dramatists, and the poets, and the great makers of our pristine prose whose works together comprise

the literature which we call Elizabethan. Every one of them might have listened to the words which fell from the lips of those namelessly remembered immortals whose learned labors finally consecrated the terms of the English Bible. And every one of them was a devoted Puritan. Their emigration was impelled by the fervent spirit of their faith. It was no such abstract love of ideal liberty as the superstitious traditions of our later democracy have fondly ascribed to them, which led them painfully to seek refuge in what Cotton Mather fitly called the solitudes of an American desert. The true impulse which founded New England was a hope that, in the unhampered wilderness of a virgin continent, the Puritans might so adjust their lives that right and rights should agree as nowhere else on earth. If you seek, then, for the great and lasting human expression of Elizabethan Puritanism, you shall not find it in literature; but turning your eyes across the seas, you shall find it there, in the planting of New England, and in the still vital historical growth which has sprung from that seed.

For, in that continent of forest and of wilderness, which even to-day is hardly yet subjected to the service of man, there was no external force which could impose on the immigrant fathers other ideals than their own. Limited and dogmatic enough these were, beyond peradventure; as far from tolerance or devotion to abstract ideals of liberty as ever were those of Strafford, or of Laud, or of Charles himself.

But, whatever else, these Puritan ideals were sturdy in their determined hope that human rights should be controlled by the Divine right which springs not from kings or bishops, but straight from the spirit of God—that a deeper principle than law itself could, and should, dominate and inspire a newly durable and vital law. And, as the fathers fell away one by one, and the generations of their children one by one stood in their places, the ideals which had been revolutionary in the old world acquired in the new the ineffable sanction of revered tradition. This paradox of ideality behind law, strengthened by three centuries of ancestral faith, is the deepest secret of American temper to-day. The changes of time have changed its utterances and its aspect; but they have never quenched its spirit.

New England, no doubt, is past its zenith; but even to this day it is to New England that those must turn who would understand, in all the mysterious and ineffable certainty of the spirit, the abiding nature of pristine Puritanism. For the lasting human expression of that intense form of Elizabethan life was unlike the rest. Elizabethan existence expressed itself in literature which shall live as long as our language. Elizabethan Puritanism, the while, created our New England, whose shadow still hovers in the sunshine.

IX

THE LATER PURITANISM

We have been compelled to turn aside from our contemplation of literature by itself, for the literature with which we are concerned can hardly be understood without some recognition of the forces which, while it was so swiftly disintegrating, absorbed the passion of the English race. In the middle of the seventeenth century, we have seen, the dominant assertion of Puritanism was a fact so far more important than any merely literary one, and yet so closely allied with the change in national temper which the period involved, that, in our study of national temper, we were bound to give ourselves account of it.

Accordingly we attempted first to grasp the chief tenets of Calvinism, the creed which the Puritans believed to comprise the truth. To them, we found, the Fall of Man, the doomed rebellion of the human will, the unmerited mercy of salvation granted through Christ to God's elect, and the consequent chance that any man might find his will divinely freed from the just doom of our race, were no formal dogmas. They were dogmas which

possessed the Puritan imagination, and exhausted its power, with all the certainty of supreme reality. Next, endeavoring for the moment to assume their point of view, we attempted to understand how the world in which the Puritans were placed presented itself to their devout eyes. So presently we came to perceive how inevitably there arose in England a conscious conflict between the ideals of right and of rights—how, to earnest men, the law of God and the laws of men must have seemed sundered or sundering; and therefore how the deepest energies of the Puritans, and all the passions which in earlier days had been free to animate all manner of expression, were concentrated in efforts to make right and rights agree. And finally we remarked that, though the earlier phases of this conflict have left little, if any, trace which has emerged into the lasting life of letters, the founding of New England, in the midst of the growing troubles, may literally be regarded as the most concrete and permanent expression of Elizabethan Puritanism. Instead of making books, the Puritans of the elder time unwittingly made a nation, which to this day preserves immutable traces of their spirit.

This necessary digression from our consideration of literature is not yet finished. Before returning to our true subject, we must follow not only the later course of Puritanism in England, but also its course in that New England, across the seas, which

almost from the very settlement was definitely parted from the mother country. After we have considered these matters, and only then, we shall be free to revert to literature—our proper business together. Glancing, with these other matters in mind, at the course which literature took in England after the Elizabethan spirit had faded, we may end, perhaps, even though of necessity our glance must be hasty, by discerning more clearly than before the fact which to my mind seems most significant when Englishmen and Americans discuss their common history together—namely, how the nation which to-day is England and the nation which to-day is America have come, for so long, to diverge.

In the years when New England was founded, about the time when King Charles came to the throne, the historic life of the mother country was beginning to move more swiftly than men realized. The emigrant Puritans who withdrew themselves to the wilderness where, presently, they were to plant a nation, left behind them an England in which their creed and their policy seemed far from dominant. One may doubt, indeed, whether any stray traveller to England toward the end of King James's reign, or during the earlier days of King Charles I., would much have remarked, or indeed need much have noticed, the existence then of those seekers for righteousness who were destined, before long, to overthrow the monarchy for a while. The kind of incident

most apt to attract a careless eye was that Prynne's "Histriomastix" cost him his ears, and sent riding across London a wonderful procession from the Inns of Court, whence gentlemen came to play before the King and Queen, in atonement for this indiscretion of one among their fellows, the most elaborate masque which as yet had dribbled from the pen of Shirley. King Charles himself, of course, was staid enough in his personal life; but, amid the lax fashions of his time, this feature of his character appeared almost in the light of an eccentricity. The court which gathered about him, and the lesser public which still thronged the theatres where the drama was sinking so deeply into its corruption—the dominant authorities of the Church, too, attempting to force upon England external conformity in the ritual beauty of holiness,—were for the moment the figures which to careless observers must have seemed most conspicuous. And more and more certainly these figures were coming to embody characteristics which marked them, in the eyes of fervent Calvinists, as children of perdition.

The course which Puritan feeling began to take was inevitable. Fancy yourself, if you can, some honest Puritan of those days, convinced that no other path than that which you were striving to tread could even lead toward salvation—far less could approach its full and ineffable reality. Then picture to yourself the wrath with which you would have resented

the growingly intolerant formalism of the established Church—silencing the preachers and the lecturers from whose lips your ears were thirsting to drink the living truth; replacing them by rites in which you could perceive only the likeness of Popish mummery and genuflexion; thrusting altar-wise to the wall the tables where you held that Scripture bade you sit at ease when you would share in the Lord's Supper; drowning the voice of heartfelt prayer in the ritual phrases of a conventional liturgy, or in the distracting strains of ingeniously interwoven chants. Picture to yourself, too, the grievous indignation with which you would have watched the gay corruption of courtly fashion, and of the lesser fashion which aped it. The vanities of this earthly life, with which such fashion seemed impiously content, were twining themselves into more and more inextricable mazes of sinful intrigue; and this same godless fashion delighted to parody these unholy vanities in comedies which it was welcome to play before the very eyes of your ecclesiastical persecutors—graceless perverters of their divine office.

As time began to pass—the days gathering themselves into weeks, the weeks into months, the months into years—there would have sunk more and more deeply into your soul the conviction that the forces arrayed against you were all and utterly evil. And long before you had phrased to yourself in formal consciousness the resolution which

was bound to arise within you, that resolution would surely have become an instinctive part of your habitual inner life. Even though the human rights of passing law might foster and protect this course of evil, the everlasting right, which must finally surmount and control all the rights of mere humanity, bade you protest against the course of earthly affairs, in the name of the Lord on High. What is more, if your cry of protest should awaken no answering change of heart among those who were rising up against you, why, next to cries must come deeds.

Yet if the troubles and dissensions which vexed England had been only matters of religion, of the spirit, the course of English history would hardly have been that which it actually took. As everyone remembers, however, the whole question was complicated with political troubles as well. Under Elizabeth, one may broadly say, the royal power had shared in the characteristic integrity of her time; on the whole, its spirit had kept in touch with the spirit of the country. Under James and Charles there came a change. The sovereign found himself more and more at odds with that powerful part of the people who were at once sufficiently advanced to feel alert interest in public affairs, and yet not so eminent as to be closely connected with the life and the intrigues of the court or of the higher politics.

The details of the confused and increasing troubles which ensued are far too intricate even for mention

now. Unsatisfactory as generalization must be, we are forced to generalize. In brief, to sum up the history which preceded the actual outbreak of Civil War, the extravagance and the incompetence—one may almost say the extravagant impotence—of the royal government involved England in expenses far beyond the national income. To meet these expenses Parliament was again and again called on for unusual grants of money. Thereupon Parliament began to criticise the conduct of the state with increasing boldness; and presently it went so far as to refuse the needful grants, except on conditions which involved, on its own part, a degree of interference with the conduct of the state which the King held revolutionary. The King accordingly endeavored to carry on the government without recourse to Parliament, and to supply himself with the requisite funds by means of certain impositions which he honestly believed to be based on legal precedent. The people on whom these impositions fell, on the other hand, were disposed with equal honesty to believe the impositions arbitrary, and therefore to hold the King revolutionary in turn. When at last, accordingly, after an interval of years, the summoning of new Parliaments proved unavoidable, the bodies which assembled, in response to the calls, turned out—in spite of the conditions which then rendered popular election so far from an utterance of the voice of the people—to be composed largely of men who fervently believed that

the course taken by the royal authority had deeply and dangerously violated their ancestral rights as Englishmen.

Taken by itself, like the austere convictions of the Puritans taken by themselves, this political crisis could hardly have led to all which followed. But the two currents of ardent protestant feeling tended to merge. It is a grave error to suppose that the full Puritan spirit, in all its phases, took the Parliamentary side, or that all the men who followed the King in the Civil Wars were free from Puritan taint. This popular tradition, however, comes near enough to the truth not to be contemptible. In fact, the section of Parliament which soon began to control its conduct was largely composed of men in whom the Puritan spirit ran deep. The misgovernment of the King and of his advisers, they presently held, had violated the civil rights and liberties of England; so they impeached Strafford. The misgovernment of the Church, they presently held in turn, had not only violated the religious rights and liberties—if indeed at such a moment anyone dreamed of true religious liberties—which were ancestrally English; but in so doing it had violated, more impiously still, that eternal right which is sanctioned by the will of God; so they sent Laud, as well, to the block. And the confusion grew ever worse confounded.

Yet blindly bewildering as the troublous history is, one can feel that on the whole the men who found

themselves forced into Parliamentary leadership began their work with no intention of proceeding beyond the law. They meant, in the beginning, only to maintain the hereditary rights of Englishmen and the eternal right of the Gospel. The current of history whirled them onward unawares. Before long, with little sense that they had exceeded their original purpose,—with small realization, it would seem, of all which they actually claimed,—they began to assert in the name of Parliament, a degree of authority which, once admitted, would amount to acknowledged Parliamentary sovereignty, reducing royalty to an empty name. This claim, of Parliamentary sovereignty, was quite as revolutionary as any claim of royalists that absolute and divine right resides in the person of the King. Yet, as one tries to see the Parliamentary Puritans as they saw themselves, one is little apt to believe that they ever suspected themselves to be revolutionists. To themselves, rather, they seemed only Englishmen, unflinchingly determined to maintain, to protect, and to defend the rights which had been confided to them by their fathers. In so doing, however, they believed themselves supported by a power higher than any which can be derived from earth; as Christians, edified by the inexpressible and superficially distorted fervor of Calvinistic imagination, they never doubted themselves to be the human repositories of divinely revealed truth. Their assertion of rights they believed

to be sanctioned by all the omnipotence of absolute right.

So when Parliamentarianism almost unwittingly proceeded to those virtual assertions of Parliamentary sovereignty which inevitably involved the tragedy of the Civil Wars, the assertions were overwhelmingly animated by all the force of uncompromising moral conviction which dwelt in honest Puritanism. Nowadays the dry logic of that grim creed seems far from stirring, in the crabbed pages which record its intricacies; and to unregenerate ears the drawls or the shouts of pious exhortation which excited Puritan fervor must always have sounded noisy, hypocritical and canting. But beneath this unwinsome exterior there burned, in the true Puritans, ecstatic fires of imaginative aspiration. It was still within the hope of any among them that he might be brought miraculously into that reconciled harmony with the purposes of God from which the sin of Adam had threatened to exclude all humanity.

And so came a sort of divine madness. These men, or many of the most earnest among them, came to believe that even though they might personally be lost,—though they themselves might never truly share in the will of God,—they might at least recognize God's will, admit it, proclaim it. They came to believe, furthermore, that, for all the sins and follies of this world, good men—devout servants of God—could, if they would make the effort with all

their hearts, impose some semblance of the Divine will on their erring fellows. By simulating the elect, in words and deeds which now seem like some holy comedy of unmeant hypocrisy, anyone, they appear to have believed, might at least serve as an instrument of God's pleasure; and thus, perhaps, though lost himself, he might help to win eternal mercy for his posterity. In religious discipline, which, in spite of opposition and oppression, these enthusiasts had been able to control among themselves, their insistence on absolute right had begun to restore what they believed to be a pristine purity of Christian worship. In this purity of worship they found at once edification and sanction for their growing faith that they might proceed to impose absolute right on matters civil as well.

It is first and chiefly, no doubt, these ardors of Puritanism which reveal what was truly the deepest passion of England in that mid-seventeenth century. Earnest Englishmen had come passionately to believe that the affairs of men can be controlled by that absolute right which resides in the will of God; and when earnest men passionately cherish such belief as this, it is bound to involve a consequent determination that since human affairs can be so controlled they must be. In this conviction and determination, however, the Puritans did not stand alone. When their ardor flamed into full revolutionary assertion of Parliamentary sovereignty, it

was confronted with other convictions and other assertions as sincere and as devoted as their own. The Royalists—the Cavaliers, as the fashion of literature has come to name them—were not blind conservatives. Rather, at their best, they were men who fervently believed that the storms of the times could be weathered only by a course widely different from that which Parliament had taken. That God's will ought to be done, on earth as it is in heaven, all earnest men, on either side, were agreed. The question which most deeply divided earnest men concerned the means by which God had chosen to indicate His will to mankind.

The Puritans, as we have seen, pinned their faith to the Bible, as the Bible was interpreted by Calvinistic theology. They turned, accordingly, to their godly preachers for guidance toward that ecstatic communion with divinity for which all might hope, though so few might attain it. Such communion, once attained, meant not only that those who could share it should enjoy the priceless boon of salvation; it meant, as well, and for that very reason, that the human wills of the regenerate, in their reconciled harmony with the will of God, were supremely right in their purposes. Such a creed appeals very powerfully to the kind of energetic men whom we call self-reliant; and is terribly open to the danger of headstrong self-assertion, which grows the more mischievous as the devoted assertors of themselves grow more and more apt to forget each his essential peculiarities.

There is another kind of men, neither worse than the self-reliant nor better, but different, who rely, for help in the struggles of this world, not on themselves, but on others. To such as these, even though they be as willing as any Puritan to admit the graceless depravity of humanity, the true voice of right—however confused by the transitory errors of mankind—is uttered by no mere book, however sacred, nor yet by the exasperating or edifying lips of any preacher. Rather it comes to us through those visible human authorities, of Church and of State alike, to whom God, in His inscrutable wisdom, has bidden lesser men be subject. It is not that kings or bishops are sinless or irresponsible. It is rather that they are God's officers, in just such sense as that in which soldiers, irrespective of their personal character, are officers of the governments which they enforce or defend. And the Divine power which commissions Church and State is the power which alone can call them to account. We must be content to let them:

> God's the hand—
> No earthly one—which may chastise the wrongs
> That royal sinners wreak, whirling along
> To their damnation, deeper still than ours,
> When God shall ask them trembling how they bore
> The trust His chrism imposed.

In the middle of the seventeenth century, the accidents of English history had given to the sovereign

a double character, which made a singularly direct appeal to such temper as this. For he was head not only of the state but also of the English church. Accordingly, the deeper and more earnest spirits who supported the sovereignty of the King against the sovereignty of Parliament tended more and more to recognize in Charles, despite those personal weaknesses which had so subtly shaken his authority, the ruler whom they were bidden to serve not only by the laws of man, but also by the law of God. So when the Puritans and the Parliamentarians endeavored to impose their authority on England, they were met by opponents as sincere as themselves. The Royalists, the Cavaliers, were less austere, less profoundly enthusiastic; but their superficial frivolity may well mislead us into a misunderstanding as deep as that which has so often been based on the superficial cant and grotesqueness of the Puritans. In truth, both sides were equally in earnest. When Puritanism sought to remould the laws and the rights of England into those new forms which it believed sanctioned by the Divine right set down in Scripture and interpreted by the saints, it was met by an equally unbending determination that those laws and rights should rather be reduced to other new forms, proclaimed and sanctioned by the divine right inherent in the King.

Amid all the confusion of that tragic time we can constantly discern the outline of this tragic conflict. On either side there was plenty of human weakness,

plenty of open sin, plenty of such endless error and distortion as still implants in many minds the conviction that human nature must be essentially wicked. Of a given man, however earnest, you might often be at pains to guess on which side he should soon be found. There were treasons in those days, too, as in all others; and there were honestly despairing uncertainties, and deep changes of heart. And beneath the troublous, bewildering surface of that tempestuous life, where the only sure fact seems that the structure of the elder world was everywhere crumbling, there were surging historical forces as certain and as mysterious as those electric forces which we are only just beginning to harness. As one reads the history of those seventeenth century turmoils, or attempts to explore the records on which that history is based, one's brain reels, like the brains of those who were striving—for the while so vainly—to bring order out of the crashing chaos. But when one lays the records down, and strives by pondering to discern some trace of the secret of their teaching, one is apt to feel slowly defining itself the verity of a world-old lesson—yet a lesson which men have never yet learned so well that it shall serve their weakness in hours of conflict.

There is somewhere a half-forgotten parable, of one who saw God, and bowed his head, adoring. Then those about him, whose eyes were blinded, asked wherefore he bowed his head. So, lifting up his face, he strove to tell them how he saw God. But even

as he strove, his eyes were blinded; and he saw God no more. So he could not make them true answer. And as for them, they could not perceive that there was any truth in him.

What fell out the parable does not tell. It is enough that one who could lose himself in ecstatic adoration could find no words which should help others to share in such mystic afflations as for a glorious instant of eternity had suffused his being; nor could those others understand how this strange parting from the rest of one among their fellows could mean anything else than the dumb or stammering madness of its outward aspect. And indeed the utterances of sincere enthusiasm are really tinged with some semi-divine madness or folly. When men are even stirred by faith in the absolute right of their cause,—still more, when such faith possesses and irradiates their whole consciousness,—they seem fatally prevented from the knowledge that the range of truth is infinite, illimitable. A little of it, and perhaps more than a little, they perceive in all the celestial intensity of its glory. But when they honestly and passionately assert that this truth which they perceive is the whole truth, all their honesty cannot keep them from uttering the beginning of implicit and insidious falsehood, the more dangerous for its very sincerity. They have fallen into the blinding error of denial that others than they can perceive any aspect of truth at all. It is the old story of the gold and silver shield.

Shrewd old Increase Mather—the greatest of the native Puritans of Massachusetts—learned this lesson well. Like many devout men of his day, he was rewarded more than once, after long fasting and vigil, by admission to what seemed to him the actual presence of God. And at first he would sometimes try to proclaim the messages with which, in these mystic interviews, God had charged him. But later he refrained from confiding them even to the pages of his private diaries, because experience had taught him that "the Flights of a Soul rapt up into a more Intimate Conversation with Heaven, are such as cannot be exactly Remembered with the Happy partakers of them."

Few men of any time, however, have been able thus to season enthusiasm with prudence. So when Royalists and Parliamentarians, Anglicans and Puritans, Cavaliers and Roundheads, faced one another in mutual defiance, neither could see much more than the rift between them, widening into the pit of destruction into which the holy fervor of each side believed that eternal righteousness bade it drive its adversaries. For the moment we may well neglect all but those earnest spirits who were impelled, despite themselves, to one side or the other. These earnest spirits could discern only that they themselves were striving, with all their hearts, for the realization of noble ideals; that they were ready to give their all for the service of that God whose will must be done

on earth as it is in heaven, in Church and in State alike. Whoever opposed them, the Cavaliers believed as profoundly as the Puritans, opposed the will of God; whoever opposes the will of God works the will of the Devil.

And yet, now that the centuries are beginning to run their later course, we can perceive how beneath their deep and passionate misunderstanding, enhanced and intensified by every manner of outward accident, there glowed in the hearts of earnest men, on either side, a common and a noble aspiration. All alike believed that the times had waxed very evil; that right and rights were no longer in any manner of accord; that the working of human laws, whether in Church or in State, had reached a pass where divine law must remould them. Yet all alike were deeply imbued with that conservative instinct which is the vital strength of English blood; no one dreamed of wantonly neglecting the past of that English nation to which all meant to be loyal. Each side sincerely believed that it could rest its case securely on what the phrase of their day vaguely called the fundamental law of England. In turning to this fundamental law, the while, each side seems passionately to have forgotten the fundamental fact which had made English law, and which makes it still, so admirably potent. Each alike appealed to fundamental law for precedents and principles which should confirm the authority by virtue of which each in its separate way desired at once

honestly and arbitrarily, to change the course of history. Neither side paused to consider what the course of history had actually been.

Now the customs of men, as they embody themselves in the laws under which, in any given age, human society can be governed, are deeply complex things, whose origin we must always seek in ancestral practice. Long forgotten though such ancestral practice be, and often distorted by use or disuse almost beyond recognition, it may no more be neglected by those who would beneficently direct public affairs, than the constitution of a patient may be, by a physician who is trying to help or to cure him. The noblest reformer who attempts to make right control the world, by arbitrarily changing the customs and the ancestral rights of any society, is doomed to tragic disappointment. You may extirpate a race or a nation, but if you spare a drop of its blood, or a gleam of its spirit, you can control it only by intuitive or cunning recognition of its organism. The historic force which gives life to peoples must be continuous; new rights and customs must spring from the rights and customs of old. In moments of national passion, earnest men, believing with honest folly that they know what absolute right is, may succeed, for a while, in imposing some semblance thereof on the rights of those who for the moment chance to be their subjects. But as soon as their merely physical force begins to relax, the distorted stream of national life

will swerve back, and its onrush will sweep the divine madmen away.

So when, in that mid-seventeenth century, Cavaliers and Puritans alike appealed to the fundamental law of England, neither of them seem even to have suspected how the true strength of that law had resided in its power of flexibly adapting itself, as it adapts itself to-day, both in England and in our continental Union beyond the seas, to the slowly and surely changing needs and conditions of men. Each side fell into the error of believing that some manner of legislation—whether the decrees of King and Council, or the votes of a Parliament which virtually expelled its own majority—could force their national history into a course different from that in which historic force was tending. Each fancied that it could supplant a system of legal rights —strong from its foundation in national life, from its adequacy to the needs of men,—by a new system which need find its sanction only in that eternal right which emanates from divinity.

We have lingered so long over these generalizations concerning the period which marks the divergence of our national ways, English and American, that we have little time left for the more palpable realities of historic fact. We can hardly name even a few of the chief among them: Short Parliament and Long; the Civil Wars; the Westminster Assembly; the execution of the King—crime if you will, almost cer-

tainly a folly, but more certainly still an act of supreme devotion; the paralyzing wrangles of the Commonwealth; the tyranny of the Protectorate; the futile Instrument of Government; and whatever else came before the acquiescence of the Restoration. But by this time we can begin to understand what all this confusion came to signify among Englishmen.

When the Civil Wars began, England was still in a state of such national youth that all men believed rights to be matters which could be controlled by a dominant assertion of right. Both sides attempted so to control them. The effort led only to a turbulence which seemed more and more destructive. So by and by came a despairing or a cynical pause. Whatever enthusiasts might assert in the name of right, practical men came to feel, rights were too precious for any further neglect. In rights lay the true safety of the nation; let right rave as it would, rights must be asserted and preserved.

The form in which English rights have been subsequently asserted and preserved, no doubt, has not been quite that in which they found themselves before the troubles. Revolutions are apt to end not in conquest but in compromise. So, speaking broadly as ever, we may agree that from the time when King Charles II. came back to his throne the actual sovereignty of England has tended more and more to reside in Parliament, which constitutionally expresses the will of the nation,

while the form of sovereignty has been maintained by the King, whose actual power has slowly decreased with the passing of time. This compromise, this acknowledged separation of the fact of sovereignty from its semblance, has on the whole persisted from the Restoration to this day. And throughout that time the English nation, taught and alarmed by the terrible experience of those seventeenth century years, has dreaded, beyond all things else in public matters, the control of established order by abstract principle. In which mood—a mood, I believe, as evident in the reintegrating literary expression of the later seventeenth century as it is in political history—we may definitely discern the characteristic which has chiefly made the national temper of England since the Commonwealth a different, and a less youthful, thing than that national temper was before the Civil Wars.

Now the fact, it seems to me, which has chiefly marked the difference between England and our New England, I might better say our whole America, across the seas, is the fact that no such change as this was ever forced, by historic circumstance, on the pristine temper of the emigrant Puritans. There was never a temper much less tolerant than that which they implanted at first in their continent of forest and wilderness. They cared as little for abstract liberty as Strafford cared, or Laud, or Charles himself. They dealt with Antinomians and Quakers as summarily as any tyranny ever dealt

with rebellion. But, by a strange paradox, the conviction which they held thus intolerantly was a self-reliant conviction in which the germs of freedom to come lay implicitly hidden. From the beginning they were strong and united in their Calvinistic faith that human rights must be controlled by that divine right which springs from no Kings or Bishops, but straight from the spirit of God Himself, as that spirit is imparted to the newly harmonized will of the saints. It was their fortune to be confronted, all in common, with the brute force of still unconquered Nature, and with the hovering presence of common enemies—French and Indian. From the beginning, therefore, their common tasks and dangers tended to strengthen their common faith by all the fellowship of common interests and common duties. So all the while that the course of history in England was changing and exacerbating the character of English Puritanism, the forces which were at work in New England were tending rather to preserve and to define the Puritanism of the elder time.

Then by and by, as the fathers of New England sank to their rest, and their children came to dwell in their places, the ideals which the fathers had brought from their Elizabethan fatherland, where the presence of an historic past was so soon to prove them revolutionary, began to acquire across seas the ineffable sanction of reverenced tradition. And thus America came to cherish its own tradition, its own spiritual

and historic continuity, which persists even to this day. The old Puritan paradox of ideality behind and above law is strong in America still, strengthened by three centuries of ancestral faith. The changes of the years have as yet done little more than to vary its aspect and its utterance; they have only just begun sadly to mature its youthful spirit. For it is only when a nation grows into all the dense and populous complexity of wealth and power that the wisdom of experience begins to force on men the lesson which England had to learn more than two hundred years ago: in this world of ours, if nations are to live, they must seek the right chiefly through the rights by which alone national life may be preserved.

Long ago, of course, America had inevitably developed certain national customs which in truth amount to a system of rights peculiarly its own. In the unnoticed divergence of these from the rights which had existed or which were developed in England may be found the secret of the mutual misunderstandings which sundered us in the eighteenth century. When the New England Puritans made their way across the sea, all Puritans alike were agreed on hardly anything more definite than that rights must be sanctioned by right. In England, as we have seen, this conviction soon developed into a claim of Parliamentary sovereignty. To New England, such a claim was totally foreign. There, to be sure, they soon developed a system of self-government; but this sys-

tem sprung from an endeavor, to use words attributed to John Cotton, "after a *theocracy*, as near as might be to that which was the glory of Israel." From this, in the end, arose something like a democratic tradition; but Americans never developed a traditional sense that the Parliament of England was in any sense their rightful sovereign. Parliamentary sovereignty had been no part of the political creed held by the emigrant fathers; and when, in 1775, America rose in open rebellion against this sovereignty, it was opposing a claim which, to its own traditions, seemed as strangely revolutionary as the assertions of absolute Parliamentary power seemed to the adherents of King Charles I. Puritan though the ancestral temper of America was, it was never quite of the Parliamentary type.

It is not long since an accomplished English student of history, examining for the first time the details of seventeenth century New England, remarked, as what surprised him most, that these Yankee Puritans seemed, throughout the century, almost Elizabethan still. At a glance, one could detect few men of the later type; Roger Williams perhaps, and John Wheelwright, who were exiled from Massachusetts; Sir Henry Vane and Hugh Peters, who soon found their way back to the mother country. What was thus true of seventeenth century New England has remained true of America ever since. To this day the American vestiges of Puritan spirit are Elizabethan still—springing straight

from the integral elder days which nurtured as well the imaginative masterpieces of poetry and of the drama.

We have strayed far and long from literature. Yet if we keep in mind the reason why we agreed to consider literature together, we may feel ourselves justified. What we have been trying to discern, through literature, is the national temper of England, as revealed there during the century of its most conspicuous recorded change. So at first we tried to define for ourselves the temper of English literature in the superb Elizabethan integrity with which the seventeenth century began. Then we traced the disintegrating drama to its decline; then we traced the other kinds of poetry in their parallel course of luxuriant decadence; then we considered the more free course, the while, of lasting prose, not yet subject to the mastery of benumbing standards. And everywhere, in poetry and in prose alike, we found ourselves left, as it were, in a world apart. The various kinds of literature which had begun by expressing in common a sense of integral and passionate national life had passed into more widely separate forms which express, at their best, the experiences of individual solitude—now fervent, now contemplative, now only prettily fantastic. The question of whither the passion of the elder time had betaken itself was forced upon us. In answering it we could not avoid our attempt to define the aspects

of English temper which inevitably ensued from the passionate growth of Puritan Calvinism.

In fact, the fierce contests which arose from this growth absorbed the passionate energies of active men. You must seek the traces of them elsewhere than in literature—in sermons and the like, in pamphlets of acrimonious controversy, in more grave and formal discussions of human rights and of divine right, in speeches, in letters, in the endless authorities concerning intrigue and warfare from which masters of historical wisdom and method are still trying to extract the outline of the truth. Our business has not been to unbury, under pretence that they are literature, the bewildering writings in which the men of those troublous times passionately recorded the facts, or attempted, each in his own way, to set forth the meaning of the passing moments. We have only been trying, by an imaginative effort of our own, to feel rather than to know what this clash of national discord was like. We have been trying to simplify the extremes of its emotion until we might begin sympathetically to understand the forces which for a while distracted England.

In our effort to understand the spiritual environment of men in that mid-century, we have at least found a reason why the chief note of literature during those days should have been a note of personal solitude. When the world is ablaze, only those can express themselves who stand aside. The histories

of these troublous times all tell us how the London tradesman Ferrers betook himself from the warring world to the gentle retirement of Little Gidding, where—apart from the growing tumults, coming and to come—he worshipped God in the beauty of holiness, separating himself from all but willing disciples, in such temper as the Church of Rome rewards with canonization. It was partly Little Gidding which inspired the devout retirement to simple duties which crowned the life of George Herbert, and which breathes its serenity through the holy books his last years have left us. From the same sources sprang the ecstatic mysticism of the Anglican Vaughan, and the burning fervor which Crawshaw could quench only in the full flood of communion with Rome. The same years brought Thomas Browne, amid the simple duties of his unconsecrated activities, to the mood which gives lasting and gentle life to the earlier utterances of his prose. And Herrick, the while, in his Devonshire personage, was content to make his life pleasant, so long as the times would suffer, with those dainty verses which are still the most delicate flower sprung from the sturdy stock of Ben Jonson.

There are other literary remains from these times on which we can hardly touch. During that half century Lord Herbert of Cherbury lived that life of the elder time so pleasantly recorded in his Autobiography. To the same period belongs the life of Colonel Hutchinson, which shows how irre-

sistibly a man who ardently loved the gentle graces of culture might find himself drawn by conviction to the side of the Puritans. In those same days Richard Baxter lived that life of humbler Puritanism which bore fruit in his "Saint's Rest"—a work of spiritual consolation not yet laid aside by the devout, and perhaps the most typical expression of the Puritan spirit we have been trying to define. To the same days, too, belong most of the lives later recorded by Izaak Walton in those biographies which men who love letters will always love to read. From the same days as well came the copious religious verses of Wither, and those quaint commonplaces of Francis Quarles, and of other writers of emblems and the like, in which simple folk took such deep, prolonged satisfaction. We might long go on, adding name after name to the worthy list.

And yet, when the last was added, one chief fact would still emerge, as that which we must surely remember. Above, beyond, beneath all else, the fact which awakened and absorbed national passion was the progress toward its temporary dominance of sombrely ecstatic Puritanism. And as Puritanism grew insistent in its assertions, there was forced upon it, with the struggle for earthly, Parliamentary sovereignty, a sore experience, which exacerbated its temper and its expression in every form. From this exacerbation, New England, as we have seen, was spared. But in England, the typical Puritans

of the mid-seventeenth century had come to differ from the Puritans of Elizabethan times.

It is a happy chance that among these mid-century English Puritans may be counted the one man of that period who is incontestably great in literature. This, of course, is Milton. Like all great men, he was not only great, but he was a man of his time as well. In turning to him now, we may accordingly find justification for these preliminary considerations of what came before him and of what surrounded him. For they may perhaps help us to understand him a little better than of old; and, at the same time, our consideration of him may perhaps help us to understand a little better than of old the aspects of national temper which we are trying to define together.

X

MILTON BEFORE THE CIVIL WARS

It is a commonplace that Milton's career naturally divides itself into three parts: his early years, when he was preparing himself for his life-work; the mid-period of his life when—almost forsaking poetry—he threw himself passionately into politics and the like, and by prose writings endeavored to influence and to mould public opinion; and the sad retirement of his blind later solitude, when he produced the great epic and the formal drama in which he summed up, as best he might, the truths which experience had taught him. To each of these periods we shall attend in turn; but we shall dwell chiefly on the first.

The facts of his life need not detain us long; they are accessible in any books of reference. He was born, in the heart of London, in the year 1608. His father, the son of an Elizabethan Catholic, had become deeply Puritan in conviction; but seems to have found no antagonism between Puritanism and culture, and was particularly devoted to the art of music. The son, a child of remarkably delicate beauty, in-

herited both the seriousness of temper which underlay his father's Puritanism and the delight in beauty which underlay his father's culture. He was a great lover of books from infancy; and when he went to school he seems occasionally to have been impatient, not because he was expected to work, but because he already knew more than many of his pedantic masters. From school he went to Christ's College, Cambridge, where he remained seven years. For the next six years or so he lived with his father, who had retired to the Buckinghamshire country. Throughout these years, both of study and of retirement, he was faithful to his serious purpose that he should be a poet, and that to be a true poet he must make his life a true poem. During these years he produced the few but admirable masterpieces which are commonly described as his early works. Then, for a year or more, he went abroad, chiefly to Italy, where he was cordially received, as an Englishman of conspicuous culture, by the literary society of the time—a society now remembered outside of Italy mostly because it was so civil to Milton. Then, probably stirred by news of the increasing public troubles at home, he returned to England, and settled for a while in London, where he took his nephews as pupils, and sundry others. And here—an accomplished and scholarly tutor, who had published a few stray poems and had written a few more—we shall leave him for a while, at about the year 1640.

Throughout these years he had shown marked personal characteristics. The tradition that his Cambridge nickname was the "Lady of Christ's," preserves memory not only of his delicate, almost feminine youthful beauty, but also of his moral fastidiousness. His traditional Puritanism apparently took the form of a personal purity, at once instinctive and deliberate, such as was more conspicuous in the early seventeenth century than it might have been at some more sober and restrained period. The sense of duty inseparable from his Puritanism impelled him the while to an unusual degree of formal scholarship; and filled him with conviction that if he were to follow the traditionally consecrated vocation of poet, he must consecrate himself to his purpose.

Most of his letters preserved from this period are in Latin, many of them in Latin verse. In one epistolary elegy which he wrote at twenty-one or thereabouts, he touches specifically on this opinion. Poets who are to sing of trivial matters—of love and the beauties of passing life,—he says, may inspire themselves with earthly stimulant—with wine and the graces of laughing girls. But he who would tell "of wars and of Heaven, . . . of pious heroes, and leaders half-divine, . . . must live sparely, after the manner of Pythagoras, the Samian teacher.[1] . . . His youth must be chaste and void of offence; his manners strict, his hands without

[1] Ille quidem parcè, Samii pro more magistri,
Vivat.

stain.[1] . . . For the bard is sacred to the gods; he is their priest; mysteriously from his lips and his breast he breathes Jove." [2] This came some twenty years before his more mature assertion of the same principles in English: "He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem, . . . not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities unless he have in himself the experience and practice of all that which is praiseworthy."

In these familiar passages you can feel, better perhaps than in more recondite ones, the temper of Milton's earlier days. Though his Puritanism had all the earnestness imaginable, it was not quickly stirred to the point of acrimony and controversy. And his methods of expression were far from such austere disdain of earthly beauties as made conventional Puritans grotesque. Every line of his Latin, brimming with the allusions and mannerisms of youthful classical lore, not yet hardened into pedantry, bespeaks a degree of formal culture which normally careless youths are apt to think priggish. What saves it is your conviction that it is not affected, but genuine; and that this genuineness involves a really loving care for austerely luxuriant beauty of form.

[1] Additur huic scelerisque vacuus et casta juventus
Et rigidi mores, et sine labe manus.

[2] Diis etenim sacer est vates, divûmque sacerdos,
Spirat et occultum pectus et ora Jovem.

Such a nature, with such surrounding and such deliberate purpose, was bound to be deeply influenced by the learning and the literature which surrounded it. To understand the earlier poems of Milton, we must accordingly glance at their historic environment —at the learning and the literature which suffused the air he breathed.

When we last touched on English learning, we were concerned mostly with Bacon and with Burton—born Elizabethans, men of the elder generation. In their youth, the Renaissance had not lost the vigor of freshness; when Milton's time came, learning had begun to pass into the rigidity of traditional culture. Yet the classics were still far from the condition which makes them seem so futile to many modern minds. They had been mustered, and duly enrolled in their stately companies; these companies had not yet stiffened again into the marble rigidity of their second death. To earnest students the languages of antiquity were still presented not as curious objects for scientific investigation, but as vehicles in which the men of ancient times had made utterances eternally significant to those elect who could be received into communion with the spirit of learning. A scholar nowadays, at least in America, is often content when he is sure of his grammar and his archæology; the elder scholarship held rather that its first business was to know, somewhat as we know living men, those greater fellow-beings of the past whose utter-

ances have become immortal. The more of them whom you thus knew, the more to whom you could easily and surely allude, the wiser and better man you would be.

To master such allusions, meanwhile, and to assimilate the spirit of the ancients, there was no other means so sure as conscientious imitation of their utterance. Amid the confusion of modern tongues, the diuturnity of the ancient languages afforded a constant vehicle in which, even though man might not quite speak to man, learning could forever discourse to learning. So, by Milton's time, there had arisen, as a definite custom, that pleasant scholarly practice of attempting to express the facts of modern life in the terms of antiquity. Milton seems to have taken eagerly to this accomplishment. You shall seek far for more typical examples of it than you may find in the Latin letters and the Latin verses of his earlier years. He accepted the conventions of his time, but he did not let them master him; he had the force to make some gleam of his individuality shine, now and again, through the formal phrases of his academic Latin.

On what he drew from modern literatures, we have even less time to touch. It is enough to say that among modern literatures the earliest, and so in his time the most deeply respectable, was the Italian; and that he was able, when he journeyed in Italy, to make Italian sonnets which proved acceptable to

the Italian taste of the moment. What concerns us more deeply is the state in which English literature found itself during his youthful years.

He was born, we have seen, in 1608. That was the year when Shakspere probably came to the end of his tragic period, and, with the imitativeness which never forsook him, was about to follow the newly popular manner of Beaumont and Fletcher. Spenser had been dead nine years; Ben Jonson was at the height of his influence; and Donne had turned from verse-making to the pulpit. Of the masterpieces of seventeenth-century prose at which we glanced, none was yet published; but the Authorized Version of the Bible, and Bacon's "Essays,"[1] and Ralegh's "History" were approaching completion. In brief, when Milton was born the true Elizabethan literature was complete, and the tendencies which marked the later course of literature in England were beginning to declare themselves; but not even the drama had reached a stage of disintegration which should naturally impress a contemporary as a certain decline.

The world was moving fast, though. In 1625, the year when Milton went to Cambridge, Bacon published his essays in their final form; and during the seven years of Milton's university life, every tendency which we have hitherto traced

[1] In the second edition, of course; the first is so slight as to be virtually an experimental overture to the final work.

in English literature was fully developed. In those years the principal dramatists were Massinger, Ford, and Shirley; the chief Spenserian poets at whom we glanced had done most of their work; the Sons of Ben were at the height of their gay obedience; the conceits of Donne were penetrating everywhere; and probably the most popular work of contemporary literature was Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy." We need trouble ourselves for the moment with no more retrospect. We must turn our attention now to the manner in which Milton, whose learning had shown itself so willing to obey the forms of conventional culture, seems to have been affected by the conventions of English literature during his earlier years.

It is evidence of Milton's precocity that one of his works, which is widely familiar among people who never suspect that he wrote it, was produced when he was no more than fifteen years old. This is the metrical version of the One Hundred and Thirty-Sixth Psalm, beginning:

> Let us, with a gladsome mind,
> Praise the Lord, for he is kind:
> For his mercies aye endure,
> Ever faithful, ever sure.

The lines have lingered in hymn-books to this day. Whoever has been brought up in regions of psalm-singing knows them by heart, and thinks of them,

with what edification or rebellion may accompany such association, as one of the chants in which congregations are invited to join. Students of Milton, on the other hand, who have critically studied the lines, find in them "rhymes, images, and turns of expression" which demonstrate some knowledge on his part of a number of English poets—among them Chaucer, Spenser, Drayton, Drummond, and above all Sylvester, whose ponderous translation of Du Bartas, a French Calvinistic poet, was among the favorite books of English Puritans throughout Milton's youth. What, on the whole, seems more remarkable than these traces of its origin are that the version, though the work of a mere boy, has such simplicity and such certainty of touch as to make it, on the whole, rather more lastingly effective than the various passages to which this or that phrase of it has been traced. In the fact that, so early in life, Milton could absorb the influences which affected him, making them his own, there is something characteristic. On the other hand, as anyone may see, this psalm is by no means Miltonic in effect.

Not particularly Miltonic, either, is the first of the surviving English poems which he wrote at Cambridge—the lines "On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of A Cough." They have Miltonic qualities, no doubt—completeness of conception, deliberation, seriousness, elaborate classical allusions; but, as was the case with the familiar psalm of a year or two

before, these qualities are not instantly salient. You feel in the lines rather, on the one hand, the metrical and formal influence of Spenser, and on the other hand an elaboration of overstrained metaphor wherein Donne, though not exactly imitated, is clean outdone. The nature of the astonishing conceit by which the pulmonary attack of the deceased baby is figured, as well as the Spenserian tone of the whole thing, appears in the first stanza:

> O fairest flower, no sooner blown but blasted,
> Soft silken Primrose fading timelessly,
> Summer's chief honour, if thou hadst outlasted
> Bleak Winter's force that made thy blossom dry;
> For he, being amorous on that lovely dye
> That did thy cheek envermeil, thought to kiss,
> But killed, alas! and then bewailed his fatal bliss.

Far more Milton's own is the first of the poems which have won him his true place in literature. This is the ode "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," made when he was only twenty-one years old. In the same Latin epistle to his half-Italian friend in which he sets forth his conception of how a poet should govern every vagary of youth, he tells how this impulse came to him on Christmas morning, 1629;[1] and of all the poems he has left us this seems, on the whole, the most spontaneous. There is plenty of Spenserian rhythm, and allegory, of course: the poem might be

[1] Dona quidem dedimus Christi natalibus illa;
Illa sub auroram lux mihi prima tulit.

called the masterpiece of seventeenth century Spenserianism. There are elaborate "metaphysical" conceits, too, such as that of the second stanza in the hymn, where Nature, who has been wantonly misbehaving in the first, is sobered by the approaching birth of our Lord, wherefore—

> With speeches fair
> She woos the gentle air,
> To hide her guilty front with innocent snow,
> And on her naked shame,
> Pollute with sinful blame,
> The saintly veil of maiden white to throw.

No imagery could be much more decadent. Such lines as these, like the lines in which elderly and amorous Winter, two or three years before, proceeded to ravish a pretty baby girl, belong, in spirit, to the days when the drama was rotting to death. And yet, taken as a whole, this great ode does not seem decadent, nor yet imitative. You can feel it, when you stop to study and to analyze, a work of its own later time, when Davenant was publishing, and Massinger, and Francis Quarles; but if you will surrender yourself to the mere delight of reading, you will be swept along with such surge as Milton's final achievement proved peculiarly his own. Yet here this surge has a spontaneity, a freshness which still reminds you that he was almost Elizabethan.

Take the stanza where he tells how the pagan gods

were smitten with fright when the incarnation of the true God irradiated earth:

> Peor and Baälim
> Forsake their temples dim,
> With that twice-battered god of Palestine;
> And moonèd Ashtaroth,
> Heaven's Queen and Mother both,
> Now sits not girt with tapers' holy shrine:
> The Libyc Hammon shrinks his horn;
> In vain the Tyrian maids their wounded Thammuz mourn.

Spenserian, if you choose to look backward, these lines, more certainly still, are fully Miltonic in their promise. It has been said that a poet is never so surely himself as when, apart from all allusion, from all positive meaning, he abandons himself to delight in the lyric use of proper names. And here you can feel, if you will, that same magic use of proper names which grandly pervades so many passages of "Paradise Lost." One might linger long over this great ode. It is noteworthy for us as showing how, even in youth, Milton, who could not help being a man of his time, could suffuse the conventions from which he was to break with his own assertive and titanic individuality.

And yet he could not do so at will. This Christmas Ode seems more than usually spontaneous. With a deliberation more characteristic than spontaneity ever was, he tried, toward Easter, to make a companion poem concerning the Passion. He gave it up, as his

note at the close of the fragment says, because he found the subject "above the years he had when he wrote it." But though we may share his dissatisfaction, and be glad that his eighth stanza proved his last, we need not accept his reason. The real trouble was that, writing laboriously, he wrote in the full conceit of his decadent time; and so wrote, as a matter of taste, abominably: for example,

> Or, should I thence, hurried on viewless wing,
> Take up a weeping on the mountains wild,
> The gentle neighbourhood of grove and spring
> Would soon unbosom all their Echoes mild;
> And I (for grief is easily beguiled)
> Might think the infection of my sorrows loud
> Had got a race of mourners on some pregnant cloud.

No wonder, a year or so later, on his twenty-third birthday, he could honestly write, in lines as simple as they are grave, and consequently individual:

> How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
> Stolen on his wing my three and twentieth year;
> My hasting days fly on with full career,
> But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.

It was about two years later, when he was living quietly at Horton, that he produced his first thorough masterpieces, "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso." In these, as much as in anything he ever wrote, one feels him absolutely himself. His gravity of purpose pervades them, with all its underlying Puritan earnest-

ness; his culture pervades them too, with less pedantry than usual; and his delight in pure beauty —in those aspects of this world which are at once innocent and pregnant with joy—is at its height. So is the deliberation which blends these qualities in lines we may fairly call faultless. There is much less trace of Spenser than in the poems he made at Cambridge; there is very little trace of such over-ingenious conceit as sprung from the influence of Donne. Though, like all his work, these poems are far from what we now call humor, there is beneath them a dominant sense of humor, which saves them from absurdity and from faults of taste. The students tell us that he was probably stirred to choice of his subjects by some lines in Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy"—a book which he is known to have read by this time. They tell us, too, that there are songs in Beaumont and Fletcher, probably earlier than these lines of Milton, and yet so like them that we can hardly hold the likeness accidental. They point out, as well, that the final couplet of both "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" is clearly reminiscent of Marlowe's "Come live with me and be my love." Yet there might be room, all the while, for an opinion which should maintain that just as the "Ode on Christ's Nativity" shows the individuality of Milton breaking through the contemporary conventions which were stiffening into rigidity the manners of Spenser and of Donne, so—more remotely—"L'Alle-

gro" and "Il Penseroso" show how this same individuality of Milton's could pervade, and alter, and absorb into a form which finally seems almost independent the contemporary conventions which, at the same time, were imposing on so wide a range of English poetry the principles asserted and practised by Jonson.

It is not that these poems imitate Jonson, nor yet that anyone could quite mistake them for conventional utterances from the tribe of Ben. It is rather that the chaste precision of their form has an underlying, as distinguished from a superficial or obtrusive, classical spirit such as makes excellent the assimilated classicism of Jonson himself. At least, it is hardly fantastic to suggest that by this time Milton, the great poet of the mid-century, had shown himself accessible to all the influences in contemporary English poetry; and had proved himself able to master those influences, instead of being mastered by them.

In the next works which proceeded from him at Horton, he appears in a totally different character. So far, except for the pleasant allusions to the stage in its nobler aspect which occur in "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," and for some conventional lines among others prefixed to the second folio of Shakspere, Milton had shown little interest in dramatic poetry. Nothing, indeed, could have been more remote from the license and disrepute of the theatre than his Puri-

tan and scholarly life. He came of precisely that social class—neither high enough to patronize the stage nor low enough to be indifferent to conventional respectability—which can concern itself with theatrical affairs only at the expense of its self-respect. But there had arisen, by this time, a specific kind of dramatic writing which was at once practicable, in the sense that it was made to be acted, and as impeccably respectable as any closet-drama fashioned on Seneca or on the Greeks. This was the masque—a kind of thing now virtually extinct, or rather, perhaps, now developed into the full professional conventions of opera and ballet.

Italian in origin, the masques were essentially elaborate spectacles, with every device of decoration, of costume, of music, of dancing and the like, which the resources of the time would allow. They were apt to be performed not by professional actors, but by courtiers or by other persons of condition who amused themselves in this elaborate and, in every sense, extravagant fashion. From time to time, professional dramatists were called on to produce the words and the plots for masques, generally allegorical in substance, which were to be performed at court or elsewhere. The dramatic literature of the early seventeenth century is full of them. They are generally as dull to read as the texts of old-fashioned Italian operas; but they are dull reading of a period when lyric poetry was still alive; and from

amid their tedious and trivial conventions, which needed, for enlivenment, all the accessories of their elaborate presentation, you can cull songs enough to make the search for them pleasant. And now and then this kind of writing emerged into a pretty, artificial excellence.

Some critics are inclined to class with masques, or at least to describe as hybrids between masques and regular plays, the exquisitely fantastic beauties of Shakspere's "Midsummer Night's Dream" and of his "Tempest." It were better to point to the interlude of Pyramus and Thisbe, in the former, as an example of the native convention which allied itself with the Italian to produce the full English masque of Stuart times; and to indicate the formal little masque with which Prospero entertains his friends in the "Tempest" as an example of what this kind of thing was like about 1612. Of the masques by the regular playwrights which have survived those which retain most vitality and beauty are perhaps the "Sun's Darling," attributed to Dekker and Ford; Ben Jonson's "Sad Shepherd"; and the "Faithful Shepherdess," of Beaumont and Fletcher. If you will surrender yourself to the spirit of these, you may find in them still not only lyric delight, but the kind of pleasure said to be attainable even to-day by people who can make themselves accept the allegories of a ballet or a pantomime.

In the days when Ben Jonson was laureate, he

made masque after masque for performance at court; and the scenic effects were contrived by Inigo Jones; and the greatest personages did not disdain to take parts in the pageant; and what it all cost, heaven knows. At all events, this kind of frivolity was peculiarly repugnant to the less cultivated Puritans, who found in it special evidence that depravity was actually saturating the great world from which they were completely shut out.

When Prynne's "Histriomastix" appeared, in 1633, a passage which, with a virulence excessive even for him, denounced female actors was taken as an allusion to the recent appearance of the Queen, Henrietta Maria, in some court masque. It was this passage in particular which brought Prynne accordingly to the pillory; and the publicity of Prynne's crime and punishment was what stirred the Inns of Court to entertain royalty with the most elaborate and costly masque as yet seen in England. The same impulse seems to have stimulated a general demand for this kind of writing. To the fact that Lawes, a musician known to be among Milton's friends, desired words for some masque-music we probably owe the fragments of a masque by Milton which are called "Arcades"—elaborate little songs and a long rhymed speech in honor of the old Countess of Derby. To the same cause which produced these we certainly owe the elaborate masque "Comus," made immediately afterwards; the three

principal parts in it were written for performance by three of this venerable lady's young grandchildren.

The first fact which "Comus" demonstrates concerning Milton is that, whatever he was, he was no dramatist. "Samson Agonistes," his only other work in dramatic form, was never intended for performance, and may fairly be judged on its noble merits as a poem. But "Comus" was made for acting. And if by chance you are ever exposed to the opportunity of witnessing an academic revival of it—we have had an admirable one, within a few years, in America—you should shun the temptation, unless you chance to be curious as to the depths of tediousness which can be compressed into an hour. An old-fashioned Calvinistic sermon is gay in comparison; and the motive of "Comus" is one which might most fitly assume the form of homiletic eloquence. Plays, doubtless, can teach and preach, and stir you still. The trouble with "Comus" is that from beginning to end its only dramatic phase is that its lines are placed in the mouth now of one lifeless personage and again of another. Nothing happens—as was apt, indeed, to be the case with masques, anyway; there is hardly a suggestion of individual character; and the speeches drag on their sonorous length until each in turn suggests some drearily fresh conception of unblest eternity.

And yet, for all this, "Comus" is a noble poem. The conventional masques, after the corrupt fashion of the time, were apt, like the sentimental plays of

the decadent dramatists, to celebrate the virtue of a merely physical chastity. Frankly accepting this conventional motive, and unwittingly admitting himself by the acceptance a poet of the dramatic decadence, Milton, with all his Puritan solemnity of temper, turned the mummeries of conventional allegory into an assertion that chastity, to be potent, must be a purity not of the flesh, but of the spirit. And bringing to his labors the elevated conscientiousness of his cultured cult of noble poetry, he made his appallingly dull play a nobly sustained and complete poem. If we cannot listen to its performance without despair, we cannot read the lines of it without that sense of deep and wondering admiration which Milton alone of deliberate English poets can kindle into some semblance of enthusiasm.

This "Comus" is not only, what the conventional masques hardly ever were, an almost classically complete composition in form. It is sustained throughout by classical unity of serious spirit, transmuting the frank paganism of Renaissance tradition into a depth of moral meaning wherein no trace of paganism lingers save in abundance of classical allusion. Throughout its lyric passages, the kind of solemn music which animates every line of "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" vibrates with all its stately power. And in the blank verse which the nominal personages so volubly roll forth, we hear at last the deep notes of that Miltonic grandeur which was to make the

diction of "Paradise Lost" a new revelation of what English verse could be.

These noble merits, all Milton's own, have brought their reward. Turning himself deliberately to dramatic poetry,—the species which, at a time just before his, had normally grown to highest excellence,—he impregnated it, just as he had impregnated the lyric traditions of Spenser, of Jonson and of Donne, with a serious grandeur of spirit all his own. He proved himself masterly, as Shakspere had proved himself masterly a generation before. Here was a poet who could not touch the work of others without leaving on it his own noble impress. More limited in sympathetic insight than Shakspere, or than the least of the dramatists, he could not make this impress other than that of his own obvious individuality; but, as we have seen, solitary individuality was growing to be typical, throughout literature, of the days through which he was living. So he made, in "Comus," the least diverting masque in English literature; and made, the while, the one English poem, in masque form, which took at once and forever a permanent place in the great poetry of the modern world.

Something similar is true of the other and the last poem which has surely survived from these earlier days. His masterpiece some are disposed to call "Lycidas"; and no comment on it would be tolerable which should distract us from its consummate dignity and beauty. Yet in its historical relation

to Milton's former poems, and to the literature which had affected these, it may prove, apart from its own lyric perfection, a matter of fresh interest and of suggestion. The occasion of it is familiar. A young man whom Milton had known at Cambridge, and who was destined for the Church,—a man who, in some intangible but unmistakable way, seems to have impressed whoever knew him as promising,—was accidentally drowned on his way home from Ireland. A volume of memorial verse, mostly in conventional Latin, was presently collected in his honor. To this collection Milton, who had apparently written no extant poetry since "Comus," contributed the pastoral elegy which alone makes the volume, or the youth it celebrated, lastingly memorable.

It has been urged by sympathetic critics that the pastoral conventions here so frankly accepted were welcome to Milton—just as they had been welcome to Spenser before him, and were welcome to Shelley in later days—because they permit a poet to wander in a region of pure, unmixed ideals, where the flights and the impulses of his imagination need never be checked by any such benumbing and controlling sense of fact as must perforce affect all literal statements, or indeed all dramatic or epic poetry which deals with actual human beings. And inasmuch as those who, recognizing the artificiality of pastoral poetry, thus assert its virtue, are apt to be themselves of poetic temper, it is perhaps rash to suppose them

in any wise mistaken. Very surely, too, the fact that pastoral conventions, in varying forms, have so long and so widely persisted means that, despite their artificiality, they must at once express and appeal to emotions widely diffused among human beings. Admitting all this, it is equally true that even the pastoral poetry of the Greeks seems an intentional, conscious conventionalizing of nature into dainty prettiness; that the Latin pastorals seem deliberately conventional imitations of Greek prettiness, admired because it proceeded from the source of civilization; and that the Renaissance pastorals of Continental Europe bear to the Latin much such relation as the Latin bear to the Greek. By Milton's time, it has been remarked, the English imitators of Continental pastorals—particularly Spenser and Browne—had introduced into this extremely artificial kind of writing pretty touches from actual nature, which brought the English pastoral somewhat nearer to life than any other since the original Greek. And there are sundry sympathetic discussions of what "must have been" the conscious motive of Spenser in choosing to celebrate Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Walter Ralegh in the guise of Dresden china shepherds.

What "must have been" the case with any man whose motives are unrecorded is a convincing statement only when you are disposed to agree. All we can surely assert concerning Spenser is that he was a conscientious experimenter, who found our Eng-

lish still untamed to such service as the conditions of civilized literature demand, and who strove deliberately to discover the civilized forms to which he could permanently tame it. His formal success was amazing. Beginning with almost blind experiments in classical metres and the like, he ended by adapting from the Italian that wonderful stanza which is so surely his own that one thinks of it rather as a creation than as an adaptation. So, long before the end,—even in many passages from the "Shepherd's Calendar,"—Spenser's style, the detail of his poetry, rose to such positive beauty that one is constantly tempted to forget the old-world archaism of the thoughts it sets forth. Yet, as one grows familiar with Spenser, none of his traits grows more certain than what has been called the pre-Quixotic vagary of his romantic invention and fantasy. He wrote the language of the immortals; but he clothed in it not so much immortal creations of imagination as ingeniously fantastic variations of conventions which appealed to his time—and so far as one can tell to him among the men of his time—chiefly because they came from regions more civilized than Elizabethan poets found their native ones. In other words, the pastoral conventions seem to have been welcome to Spenser for the same reason which made Greek pastorals admirable to the Romans of the Empire—because they were the fashion among people whom he wished to imitate and to emulate.

Milton's frank acceptance of pastoral convention in "Lycidas" indicates something similar. In the Latin letters of his youthful days, in the Latin elegies which he made at Cambridge and later printed, in almost every record of his early studies and expressions, there is trace of his personality; and those who seek in them chiefly the Milton who was to be will doubtless find him. But those who should approach the same records unprejudiced would be apt to find in them little more than astonishingly thorough examples of how a studious youth, saturated with the scholarship which in Milton's day was orthodox, could, with all the ardor of what he deemed sincerity, expend endless energy in assimilating himself to utterly unreal conventions. An English youth expressing himself in the terms, and striving to express himself in the mood, not of England but of civilized antiquity, is after all a masquer. That he does not know himself for one does not change the fact. It only marks him either as lacking humor—as Milton lacked it, and Shelley, too; or else as of a period, like that of Spenser, when the art he practised is not yet so fully developed that the saving grace of humor can sweeten and humanize it.

Now the pastoral conventions of "Lycidas" may surely be held dear to Milton because of the freedom they gave him to muster in a single poem images and fancies from the whole range of his learning, his speculation, and his culture. But it may equally be main-

tained that there is no reason for so abstruse an explanation of them. Milton, we have seen, was a poet in whose conscientious and deliberate work one can find trace after trace of the poets who preceded him—of the old Puritan Sylvester, of Spenser, of Jonson, of Donne, and even of Beaumont and Fletcher and of Marlowe—of the makers not only of lyrics and epics, but of court masques. When he had written before, he had seemingly chosen his form, as anyone else would choose it, because the form was recognized. And thus, at least we may suppose, he chose a pastoral form for his elegy because in his time that form was regular.

This does not mean that he left the form where he found it. We have seen enough of him already to understand how from the beginning he was of those poets who, in adopting the conventions of other men, impress on them their own individuality. And by the time of "Lycidas," the individuality of Milton had grown more austere. The mood even of "Comus" is more severe than that of "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso." In "Lycidas" his Puritan severity has deepened until his final utterance of it rises to the height of deliberate prophecy:

> How well could I have spared for thee, young swain,
> Enow of such as for their bellies' sake
> Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold!
> Of other care they little reckoning make
> Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast,
> And shove away the worthy bidden guest!

Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
A sheephook, or have learn'd aught else the least
That to the faithful herdsman's art belongs!
What recks it then? What need they? They are sped
And, when they list, their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw;
The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed;
But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread;
Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw
Daily devours apace, and nothing sed;
But that two-handed engine at the door
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.

History was moving fast in those days; and Laud's efforts to enforce conformity were concentrating the Puritan spirit in a conscious antagonism more and more burning. These were just the years, too, when New England was founding. When Milton went to Cambridge, the only settlement in New England was that at Plymouth; when "Lycidas" was published, there were already undergraduates at Harvard College. The period during which we have been following his development was precisely that when the traditions of New England parted from those of the mother country. And Milton does not burst forth into the full austerity of his Puritanic denunciation till this "Lycidas" of 1638. Here he shows himself no longer Elizabethan, but stirred by the Puritanism of the years to come—the militant Puritanism of the seventeenth century. And thus, by the individuality

which broke through the confines of accepted pastoral convention, he made of "Lycidas" what he had made of "Comus," three or four years before. It is at once an example of a literary type accidentally popular in his time, always artificial, now outworn; and the expression of a poetic individuality so dominant and so assertive, in its strange combination of Renaissance culture with Puritan austerity, that even the substance of this poem would give it lasting place in literature. When we add to this the magical beauties of its verse, we can see why, again and again, men forget its archaisms of conception and fashion, seeing in it only—what it surely is—an immortal masterpiece.

At the same time, this masterpiece,—like "Comus," and like "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso,"—full though it be of Elizabethan influence, is no longer a poem which anyone could guess to be of the true Elizabethan period. The note of that elder day, as we have so often reminded ourselves, was a note of national integrity. In whatever ways Elizabethan Englishmen expressed themselves, you can always feel that they were intelligible to another; one and all seem, as we regard them in the perspective of time, contemporaries and fellow-countrymen. As we followed the course of seventeenth century literature in its various streams toward and beyond the time to which we have now followed the career of Milton, we remarked, as perhaps its most characteristic trait, that the men who expressed themselves in lasting

English seemed more and more solitary. Compare Shirley with Shakspere, Herrick with Ben Jonson, Sir Thomas Browne with Bacon, and you will feel the fact now in question. Whatever the merits or the powers of the later generation, it had distinct limits. Each man, in those later days, seems no longer to address the whole body of his countrymen; he speaks only to those who are disposed to listen. Nor does he always seem much to care whether many listen or not.

In the case of Milton, this kind of personal solitude, so generally characteristic of his contemporaries, appears with extreme distinctness. It is not quite the result either of his origin or of his native temper. A generation earlier, and a generation later, you can imagine,—in times when English literature was still integral, or in times when it tended to reintegration,—this Milton, with his purity of purpose, with his mingled austerity and culture, need not have sat apart or stood alone. The willingness with which he adapted himself, in his Latin writings and his English alike, to forms of expression which were recognized as excellent would prove him by the width of heaven apart from those eccentrics of decadent literature and art who can be what they deem their true selves only when they deliberately avoid resembling anyone else. The solitude of Milton is rather the inevitable solitude of his disintegrating time. He was too masterful and too masterly not to

be himself; and asserting himself, he asserts something apart from others, not something which instantly appeals to common humanity.

A subtle fact, this, and one which may seem doubtful. Yet, there can be little question that, whether or no, the great surviving figures of art and of letters are bound to have a double aspect. In one phase they are everlasting—persisting through the generations, safe above the storms of time. As such, perhaps, we are wisest generally to recognize and to consider them. But in another phase they prove, even despite themselves, men of their own time, too. And none was ever more so than this Milton—a Spenserian, touched by the traditions of Jonson, too, and of Donne; a maker of masques, like the playwrights; a maker, as well, of pastoral elegy, like Spenser and more; assertive, like any great poet, of his own individuality; and thus asserting his individuality not a great man dominant—like Shakspere before him and Dryden afterwards—but a great man inevitably apart.

These English poems, at which we have glanced as closely as is now possible, were the chief utterances of his early period. Immediately after he wrote "Lycidas" came his journey to Italy. In the course of this, he seems to have been cordially welcomed, wherever he travelled, by men of fastidious culture, who found in him an Englishman of such academic accomplishment as could maintain itself with the best of Continental Europe. In a way, as one glances at

what records remain of his travels, these months of pleasant wandering in the regions which have always proved most sympathetically stimulating to English poets, and to American poets as well, seem the least solitary of his life. At any time there is scattered through the civilized world a little brotherhood of culture which eagerly recognizes its fellows, stray from whence they may. And often men of this type feel most themselves while they are wandering,—when, at each new turn, they meet congenial spirits with whom they do not linger long enough to differ. Such journeyings are not precisely fruitful. In the pleasant eagerness with which travellers suddenly feel the reality of regions and men who have been familiar to them only in the half light of reading and learning, there is little time left for such depth of experience as should instantly demand or find adequate expression. The days of journeying are not generally days of harvest; but the seeds which fall in those pleasant times are apt to sink deep. So in memory, as in anticipation, such days are apt to seem the most delightful granted on earth to those whom temperament, or the state of their times, condemns at home to solitude.

The chief poetic traces of this period in Milton's life are the few Italian sonnets, in which he proved himself so accomplished a man of culture. How these may seem to Italians, one can only guess. To Englishmen, they confuse themselves with the work of the

long forgotten Italian versifiers who in Milton's time prettily maintained the graceful fantasies of a highly conventionalized poetry. Whether their sentiment is genuine, no one knows. They may have been made for some living lady, who chanced to touch the fancy of the accomplished traveller from beyond the Alps and the Channel; just as the earlier Latin elegy which celebrates the charms of English girls may perhaps relate, in its conventional guise, some actual and innocent youthful flirtation. On the other hand, they may be merely conventional exercises, made during pleasant moments when the poet whose real individuality was so crescently austere abandoned himself freely to the lighter pleasures of confident scholarly mastery of his vehicle. At all events, the records of Milton's months abroad are records only of happily insignificant culture—of such temper as whiles away hours in graceful and harmless pleasure.

With Milton this interval did not last long. Why he returned to England is not precisely known. It has been thought, and reasonably, that news of the rising troubles in his country made him feel that his place was there, where before long he had another part to play than that of a late Elizabethan poet, strengthened and individualized by the convictions of a Puritanism which was beginning to dominate him, just as it was striving to dominate his country. There may have been less spiritual reasons; the times were growing hard, and money was not to be had so much

for the asking as it had been. At all events, home he came, and settled in London, and fell to teaching his nephews and the rest; and from that time on, for years, we hear little more of him as a poet. In the times about to come, there was other business than poetry for him; and he was Puritan enough to feel that, first of all, he must do his duty.

It was after he came back to England, and before the period of his prose and his sonnets, that he wrote what we may regard as the last record of his earlier life. While he was abroad, his intimate friend, the half-Italian Diodati, had died. Edward King, it seems, whose death Milton commemorated in "Lycidas," was not personally very near to him. In that great elegy, the greatest memorial poem of our language, we might accordingly suppose him to have chosen the conventional pastoral form partly because the grief it celebrated was itself in some degree conventional. With Diodati the case was different. Yet when Milton, already the greatest master of English verse then living, or living since, set himself to the heartfelt task of making a poetic monument for the friend who was probably his dearest, the form he chose for it was not only pastoral, but Latin, too.

In those days, of course, Latin was still the common language of learning and of culture throughout the European world. A sound reason for Milton's choice of it might consequently be found in the fact that his Latin verses would convey their meaning not only to

Englishmen, but to all the elect of culture everywhere. To outlive bronze or marble, he may have held, literature must express itself in the terms which had already survived the centuries. And those few of our contemporaries to whom the Latin lines still speak an undying and living language, profess to find in the "Epitaphium Damonis" a power and a passion as great as that of "Lycidas." This power and passion, they declare, is combined with a truly classical severity of form no longer mingled with the exuberant luxuriance of the Renaissance; it is combined, too, they tell us, with a depth of personal feeling which fills the poem not only with dignity and with beauty, but with the added humanity of pathos. To those, on the other hand, who know no more Latin than most of us learned at school, what seems most remarkable, and consequently most deeply characteristic, about this poem, is that the choice for a deeply sincere purpose of a vehicle so doubly conventional as a Latin pastoral proves Milton, beyond anything else we have touched on, a poet who desired less to express his impulses than faultlessly to observe the principles of his art as the doctrine of his time proclaimed them.

With his work to come we have no concern now. That belongs rather to what was then the future than to what was then the past. The chief literary figure common to both of these periods is this Milton. At his early career we have now glanced. He began his work in the later years of the elder time; he

was sensitive to all its finer influences, of scholarship and of culture alike; he was not so consciously superior to its mannerisms as the final isolation of his greatness may have made us commonly suppose; but his personality was so strong that whatever mannerism he copied became subtly an expression of himself. And this self of his, with its Puritan seriousness and austerity, was essentially solitary. And the times grew troublous. And they seemed to call him to be up and doing, otherwise than he had done in the gentle retirement of his youth and of his first manhood. And he made his final monument of those elder days in the Latin pastoral which commemorated, after the fashion which he fancied should be most lasting of all, the man whom in those days he had loved best. And so he turned his face from the past, to the present, toward the future.

XI

THE MATURITY OF MILTON

It may seem that we have dwelt too long on the earlier part of Milton's career—on the years when he was growing to the complete individuality which has left in our literature a grander record than any since, or than we can quite believe destined to be made by any poet to come. Yet the earlier years of life, though rarely the most significant, are apt to be the the most important. The date of a man's birth implies, as nothing else can, the surroundings amid which he grew to the maturity.

So even though we must now speed on, we did well to recall how Milton was born before the disintegration of his century had forced Puritanism into that place apart which so changed the course of English history; and how, with all the seriousness of cultured Puritanism, he was convinced that, to be a true poet, he must make his life a true poem. We did well to recall how accordingly, while still a youth, he became, after the manner of his time, a master of classical learning, then far more humane than it is now; and how among Eng-

lish writers of Latin he was perhaps the most vitally individual. Above all, we did well to emphasize how, meanwhile, like any true man of letters, he was willingly sensitive to the influences of contemporary literature in his own language—chiefly, no doubt, to that of Spenser, but still unmistakably to those of Jonson, and Donne as well, and even to that of the drama; how he steadily revealed his individuality by mastering these influences, instead of being mastered by them, as lesser men were; and how, all the while, the disintegrating tendency of his time made him, despite his willing freedom from the eccentricity of petty talent, not the dominant figure of a growing school of letters, but a masterly poet more and more solitary and apart. In the prophetic indignation which inspired portions of "Lycidas," we may finally remember, there appeared at last clear token that, amid the rising troubles of the time, the Puritanism of Milton was passing into the militant form peculiar to the seventeenth century.

There we left him; and there, in a way, we must take our farewell of him. For we have no time to linger over details of his personal history during the years which were still before him, nor yet to dwell on the grand beauties of the later works which have won him place among the few great poets of all time. We have time only for a glance at the three distinct records of his later years which remain so deeply individual and impressive. These, of course, are his

prose writings; the sonnets which at intervals revealed how deeply his poetic power burned all the while when he held that duty bade him turn aside from poetry; and the great poems of his blind and retired solitude. Of all these we must speak hastily, touching only on such features of them as seem essential to our purpose together.

The prose works of Milton which are most generally remembered were published between 1641 and 1649. Only one of them—the "Areopagitica"—is much read nowadays; but the names of all are familiar to any student of literature. To careless students the names are apt to seem those of solitary things—unlike what anyone else wrote. Yet whoever will pause to consider not the lasting literature of England during the seventeenth century, but its printed records, must instantly grow aware that these include an enormous and bewildering mass of controversial prose, in every imaginable form. In copiousness and significance, these records are something like the newspapers of the last hundred years. Most of this old controversial prose has long been dead and gone; the spark which keeps some of Milton's alive, accordingly, makes it now seem a thing by itself. In fact, however, these works of his, in their own time, were only his earnest and passionate contribution to a torrent of expression, of which the bulk seems limitless. One knows not whether most to wonder that none of the rest has survived, or that even Milton's

power was great enough to give lasting life to a kind of writing essentially so ephemeral.

And, on the whole, as you ponder on this prose of Milton's, together with the dead prose which was once alive about it, you are less and less apt to feel much difference between his and the rest. The "Areopagitica," we have just seen, has survived in substance,—a fact sometimes held due to the circumstance that so much of it is incontestably right. Another way of stating the same fact would be to say that here, for once, in urging something like liberty of opinion, Milton chanced upon a principle which the history of ensuing centuries has happened to sustain. A different turn of history might conceivably have given similar sanction to his contentions concerning episcopacy, or marriage, or royalty; and have withheld historic sanction from those which concerned liberty of thought and of expression. More and more, it seems to me, these prose writings of his group themselves historically together, just as they group themselves with other and similar writings of their own day. The impulse of them all was the impulse on which we touched so frequently when we were trying to give ourselves account of the growth and of the surroundings of seventeenth century Puritanism. The men of those years found themselves possessed by the conviction that they knew what was absolutely right; and that therefore they were bound, each in his own way, to set forth what was right, and to impose it—if by any effort

it might be imposed—on the errant course of human rights. For rights, everybody agreed, had strayed far from forms which anyone's conception of absolute right could sanction. If you desire concrete examples of the kind of expression which I had in mind when I touched on this matter before, you need seek no further than almost any of Milton's prose writings. Open your volume where you will; it is all one.

In general, as we have seen, the controversial prose of seventeenth century England proved futile. On the whole, indeed, so far as positive and practical result goes, Milton's proved futile, too. What has really preserved it, in tradition, is not its substance, but rather the manner in which now and again that substance is set forth. Milton, we must remember, belonged to an age when English prose still preserved some of its pristine freedom from the trammels of convention. Though no longer Elizabethan, this prose was far nearer the spacious scope of the elder time than was any form of English poetry, lyric or dramatic. And indeed one may fairly doubt whether English prose has ever been in a state more fitted to express sincere and passionate individuality. So while in Milton's prose you may find dull passages enough and to spare,—crabbed passages, too, and passages distorted by that ugly virulence of temper which was inseparable from the acrimonies of his time,—you shall rarely search it long anywhere without coming upon passages which, wherever you found them, you would

instantly recognize as in the nobler sense Miltonic. They are not fastidiously beautiful; they are far from the fantastic grace or quaintness which make so much seventeenth century rhetoric a pleasant toy for idle hours. They are hardly ever captivating or winning. But, with a sonorous fervor of their own, they are, in every sense of the word, admirable; they excite your wonder, they excite your respect, and if only as noble outbursts of English eloquence they excite your approval. There is nothing else like them in our language for a certain austere intensity of passion—an emotional quality so distinct from their meaning that you might often fancy it compatible with utterly different convictions and purposes from those which it sets forth.

We might linger long over this emotional individuality of Milton's—analyzing it, so far as we might; defining it. We might dwell, too, on the historically significant fact that the prose style of Milton is perhaps the last noteworthy example in English literature of a kind of expression possible only when prose was still free—not yet bound by acknowledged precedent to follow convention. We might study in some detail the almost equally important fact that he was among the last writers of English prose who, when moved to earnest expression, instinctively thought in Latin terms; and who therefore suffused what they supposed to be vernacular expression with such sustained and sonorous rhythm as would have animated

their phrases if they had actually written Latin. On the whole, however, the most important aspect for us of Milton's prose is one which concerns its substance.

In essence, we have seen already, this substance is not very different from that of the copious controversial writing then prevalent. Amid the bewildering confusion of the times, individuals, believing each in his own that they knew what was right, attempted, each with his own limits, to persuade others to the right course. Among these individuals Milton was the most remarkable. He was no more free from traces of the epoch when he lived than were any of the rest; you can detect in him plenty of impatience, plenty of acerbity and virulence, and very little serenity. His earnestness was deeply Puritan, in that it was not tempered by wide human sympathy, nor yet sweetened with humor. But amid it all you can discern in his individuality—more clearly perhaps than in that of any of his contemporaries—the aspect of human nature which made Puritanism at once potent and futile. From his very youth, we saw, Milton's nature had a kind of purity—of personal cleanness—which would have marked him, in any age, as one apart from the general frailties of humanity. Men thus apart are never quite able to understand the kind of baseness which makes the earthly course of most men a matter of painful stumbling. Were all men cast in such mould, human

nature would not be the thing it is, nor human history.

The precise quality I have in mind is most evident, perhaps, in that part of Milton's prose writings which, even in his own time, got him most into trouble,—his utterances concerning marriage and divorce, evoked by his far from peaceful conjugal experience. There is no need for commenting on them in detail, nor for pointing out how remote his opinions were from that dogmatic assertion of equality between men and women which happens to be so popular nowadays. The important fact for us to remark is that, so long as men in general remain what men have been throughout recorded history, the kind of marital freedom urged by Milton could result, so far as any common-sense may assert, only in socially destructive licentiousness. Were most men Miltons the case would be otherwise. He never seems quite to have understood how far from Miltons most men have been, and are. And so, in urging a reform which, in his own case, might really have solved a social problem, he unwittingly argued for a state of society which is beyond the scope and power of ordinary human nature.

What was thus true of Milton's argument concerning marriage and divorce seems, on the whole, true of all his contentions for reform, from beginning to end; indeed it is apt to be true of earnest reformers throughout time. The greatest infirmity of noble minds, it

often seems, is that they cannot understand the greater infirmity of minds which are not, and which never can be, noble. The Calvinism of the Puritans, to be sure, frankly and explicitly asserted that human nature is radically base. But when the Puritans themselves became militant reformers, they could not quite avoid the pitfall of militant reform throughout history. An earnest reformer, even though graced with humility of spirit,—and humility never seems to have been the chief spiritual grace of Milton,—is bound to conceive his opinions to be those of the elect. If he proceeds to impose those principles on other men, he attempts tyrannically to hold these others to a standard above that of human nature. If, on the other hand, he appeals to them, in the hope of stirring them to acquiescence, he assumes that their nature is higher than in fact he shall ever find it. In either case, he is doomed to tragic failure; he is forced in the end apart. His voice may echo down the ages, exhorting still, even till time ends; but those who dream that Utopias can be anything but dreams may never wake except to disappointment and to solitude.

Of Milton's prose I can say no more. If these cursory words have helped to show its place in the temperamental history of England, if they have shown how far it goes to exemplify our generalizations concerning the Puritans, they will have done all that we can now hope for. We must turn, in the same way, to Milton's brief and few poetic utterances

meanwhile. These are the great sonnets which will always be among the glories of our literature.

Among all his work, it seems to me, no part more clearly reveals his dominant individuality. If one may characterize this individuality, as it appears in literature, by any single word, the word for it is perhaps masterly. Other poets now and again accept conventions, and imitate them, and perhaps improve them. Others deliberately break from convention, striving for novelty, for oddity, for eccentricity, for whatever may seem peculiarly their own. Now, from the beginning, Milton was eager to learn all he could from the great and good who had preceded him; but he used his learning and his culture to express a meaning so distinctly his own that his finally written words seem assertively Miltonic. Even in his early Spenserian verses, one thinks first of Milton; it is only when one begins to ponder that one feels how surely the influence of Spenser pervades the lines and the rhythm. And this is more true still of those passages in his early work which reveal the influences of Jonson and of Donne. And "Comus" is first of all a Miltonic poem—not an English masque; and if we were considering merely the history of English pastorals it might be almost a surprise to find that among the rest we must study so individually Miltonic a poem as "Lycidas." Milton's prose, too, shows how his individuality could pervade and waken into lasting life a kind of expression which in every other case than his

withered almost as soon as the actual occasion of it became a matter of the past. In the sonnets, this masterly power is at its height.

No English lyrics, I think, more clearly illustrate that modern definition of lyric poetry which holds it to be essentially subjective—an expression of what the poet actually thinks and feels. The old sonnets of Italy, the sonnets in general of Elizabethan England, and even the Italian sonnets which Milton himself made during his sojourn in the regions from which all our modern civilization has sprung, are at best pleasantly artificial. As works of art, they are now and again very beautiful; now and again, you are moved to wonder whether Sidney, or Shakspere, or whoever else, was not perhaps using this exquisitely ingenious vehicle to express not conventional but passionately sincere emotion. Yet I am tempted to say that until Milton's own time you can never feel quite sure, either in England or in Italy itself, of how genuine a given sonnet is. Again and again you are sure that one of these little poems is a thing of beauty containing deathless phrases; yet all the while you are equally sure that it is a deliberate and a very elaborate work of rigidly conventional art. With Milton's sonnets the case is altogether different. Your first impression is sure to be that the poet meant every word he set down. He meant it, no doubt, with very different degrees of intensity; some of the sonnets are hardly more than occasional poems; two

or three reveal the uglier phases of temper with which the virulent controversies of Milton's time disfigured many passages of his prose; but the best of them express heartfelt meaning with a fulness of mastery which makes one forget that they are sonnets at all.

You can find all these characteristics in the sonnet "On His Blindness," often held his best:

When I consider how my light is spent
  Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
  And that one Talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
  My true account, lest He returning chide,
  "Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
  Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best
    Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed,
  And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
    They also serve who only stand and wait."

As you ponder over these lines, you cannot but feel how they show his thorough knowledge of the intricate sonnet form, together with his masterful disdain of its finer technical niceties—of quatrain, octave, sestet, and the like. You cannot help feeling, either, how their involved syntax shows his Latin habit of thought. Yet, for all this, the poem seems as sincere an expression of personal feeling as you can find in any autobiography or confession.

He had done his active service by this time—to the state which for a while the Puritans had dreamed might replace the England of the past by an utterly regenerate England for all the future. And history was speeding fast. Before long the Protector was dead; and it was not much longer before the Restoration. A final darkness had fallen not only on the eyes of Milton, but on that Elizabethan England in which he was born, and on that Puritan England too which he had hoped to see established in its place. And it was amid this darkness that he made at last the poem which none but he could possibly have made. For as surely as Spenser is the maker of the "Faerie Queene," Milton is the maker of "Paradise Lost." That would remain, if all the rest vanished.

Beyond the work which came before, and I am tempted to say beyond any other great work in literature, this colossal epic stands apart. The more you study Shakspere's plays, the more close and intricate you find their relations to the literature of their time; the more normal they seem, for all their wonderful power. And glancing on to the third great figure in the history of English literature during this seventeenth century, you can assure yourself that Dryden too was a man of a school, which he perhaps founded and certainly dominated; he was never a great figure apart. Even in Milton's earlier work,—to that very sonnet, indeed, in which he so solemnly recorded the sealing of his eyes,—you can feel, together with all his

masterful individuality, trace after trace of the literature about him. We have remarked the relations of Milton's early poems to the work of the elder poets —Spenser, and Donne, and Jonson; to that of some of the dramatists, as well, in their loftier moments; we have seen how he was affected by the literatures of antiquity and of Italy, and by the torrent of controversial prose which flowed before and about his prose utterances. Throughout, we have felt how his individuality, always inevitably assertive, was strengthening. In his later period this individuality had become something utterly apart—until "Paradise Lost" seems something almost superhuman.

Superhuman, I mean, in its isolation, in its grand solitude. One cannot too often repeat that it is in nowise eccentric or abnormal, that it never seems deliberately different from what other men may have attempted. Nothing could be much more remote from the kind of oddity which now and again belittles much nineteenth century literature, in England and America alike. Carlyle is great, if you like, and so is Browning; so is Emerson; so, perhaps, in his own way, is that anarchistic Walt Whitman. But each is great, if great he be, in spite of his manner of expression. No doubt, the distorted style of each may be due to some pitiable mental peculiarity, analogous to physical deformity; but nothing can prevent it from seeming deliberate. One and all of these moderns set forth their meaning in a kind of pervasive falsetto

screech, uttered by each in his own discordant way, as if to attract attention to himself. In Milton there is never a trace of any such thing. "Paradise Lost" no more suggests intentional oddity than his early poems do, in their willing acceptance of all the aids which convention could give them. It only reveals, in a grandeur and a loneliness unspeakably superb and pathetic, the finally inevitable individuality of the one great poet who found his life and his lot cast in the disintegrant times of the English Puritans. So in the literature which came before it there is nothing to which we can instantly feel it similar; nor yet, and still more obviously, is there anything similar to it in the literature which came to light during the years when it was making; and there is nothing quite like it, either, in the literature of the centuries which have ensued. Milton's manner, no doubt, has been imitated by admirers in later times; yet none of these, I think, has in the least found the secret which makes every line of Milton Miltonic. Milton really stands alone—the one true poet of the national disintegration of England.

This does not in the least mean that the solitude of "Paradise Lost" is monstrous or at all miraculous. Its solitude, indeed, as I have tried to point out, marks the poem as a normal product of Milton's own time—a time when the elder solidarities were gone, and the newer still to come. And the very nature of its fable, to say nothing of the allusions

throughout its course, marks it by the width of heaven apart from those occasional works of later poetry which pride themselves on eccentric originality of invention. It is conceivable, indeed, that "Paradise Lost" may have been in some degree instigated, or suggested, by Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas; it is perhaps possible that Milton's imagination may have been stimulated by some Dutch poem of Vondel's; and so on. That, if this be true, "Paradise Lost" transcends all traces of its lesser origins, until those origins become a matter of mere curiosity, only marks the poem as great. All great poems do the like.

What marks its greatness almost uniquely is the relation it bears to those grand originals which show their traces throughout. The fable, of course, is taken from the very beginning of Scripture itself. The narrative throughout is enriched by endless allusion both to the whole course of Scripture and to almost the whole range of classical learning—to the acknowledged masterpieces of antique literature which have outlasted the centuries and emerged into the serene loftiness of immortality. Any poet can take his fable from Scripture, and can fill his verse with allusions to the great poetry of the past. It is the lot, the while, of almost every modern poet but Milton—of all the others, I am tempted to say, except Dante, already in Milton's time as immortal as he is to-day—that when, even for an instant, you compare their work

with its supreme sources, you instantly feel that those sources welled far richer than the streams diverted from them. Shakspere, with colossal ease, could make permanent literature of his quaint mediæval chronicles and stories; he could marvellously vitalize Plutarch, too; but in "Troilus and Cressida," the only play where he comes near measuring himself with Homer or with any great precursor, you feel that, for all the glories of Shaksperean poetry, Shakspere presents a Trojan War which is far beneath the heights of the Iliad. And what happens to lesser men anyone can see who will compare the various modern plays and poems concerning Francesca da Rimini with the supreme passage, in the fifth canto of Dante's "Inferno," where her story was first and finally told.

With Milton, the case is wonderfully different. Read Scripture, if you will, and then turn to your "Paradise Lost." Turn then to whatever poet you chance to love of Greek antiquity or of Roman. Turn to Dante himself, who alone among modern poets had risen in Milton's time to something like the serene eminence in which men now discern the great poets of antiquity. Then turn back to Milton. Different, you will find him, no doubt, in the austere isolation of his masterful and deliberate Puritanism and learning; but that difference does not make him irrevocably lesser. Rather you will grow more and more to feel how wonderful

his power proves. Almost alone among poets, he could take the things for which he had need from the masters themselves, as confidently as any of the masters had taken such matters from lesser men; and he could so place these spoils of masterpieces in his own work that they seem as truly and as admirably part of it as they seemed of the other great works where he found them.

His own work, of course, in the fulness of his maturity, was more his own than ever. Throughout it you feel all the characteristics of which we have been trying to trace the growth—the Puritan seriousness of his earliest and constant purpose; his love of austere yet luxuriant beauty of form; his mastery of classical learning, as classical learning existed in his seventeenth century; his wide and deliberately mastered erudition; and the embittered Puritanism which marked almost all English Puritans of the days of struggle and of failure. You feel him throughout a true poet; but a poet singular among the great ones for a deliberation, for a lack of apparent spontaneity, which in almost any other man could hardly have broken through the limits of superb rhetoric into the free air of lasting literature. Of all English poetic styles, his is the least inevitable, the most magnificently artificial, the furthest from unthinking utterance. It is full of music, but the music is not vocal; it is more like that which immensely

skilful hands can evoke from the incredibly complex mechanism of some vast church organ. And yet the phrases never sink to the level of mere convention; they are as distinctly, as irrevocably Milton's as was that blind solitude in the midst of which they were made.

All the while, too, "Paradise Lost" remains a normal human thing, in that it is truly a work of its own time. Not long ago, I was turning its pages in Italy, the country where Milton passed the months which one may guess to have been the pleasantest of his earthly life. A marvelous place, that Italy, with its immortally beautiful landscapes enshrining countless relics of mortal beauty—the grandeurs of ruined Rome, the quaint distorted splendors of the ages they used to call dark, the buoyant fine art of the resurgent Renaissance, the fantastic excesses of its luxuriant decline. As I read my Milton in Italy, I grew aware that the images which so grandly consoled his blindness seemed unlike those of the great Italian days. And yet they were such as any traveller in Italy must often see. They were very like the figures and the landscapes which make the visible traces of seventeenth century Italy, left by hands never themselves masterly, things from which we are apt to turn aside with some shade of disdain.

Such impressions, no doubt, are too personal for assertion as true. But take at random some lines in which Milton sets forth the wonders of Eden:

Groves whose rich trees wept odorous gums and balm;
Others whose fruit burnished with golden rind
Hung amiable—Hesperian fables true. . . . .
Betwixt them lawns, or level downs, and flocks
Grazing the tender herb, were interposed,
On palmy hillock; or the flowery lap
Of some irriguous valley spread her store,
Flowers of all hue, and without thorn the rose.
Another side, umbrageous grots and caves
Of cool recess, o'er which the mantling vine
Lays forth her purple grape, and gently creeps
Luxuriant; meanwhile murmuring waters fall
Down the slope hills dispersed, or in a lake,
That to the fringèd bank with myrtle crowned
Her crystal mirror holds, unite their streams.

Try to visualize that landscape, and you will be more ingenious than I if you can make it take much other form than you may see in the background of some Bolognese picture of Diana and her nymphs. Fancy, if you can, some sculptured Miltonic Adam or Satan; and see whether the form is not strangely like those colossally distorted ones which the Italians made in Bernini's time and after. Try to translate Milton's Eve into terms of painting; and tell yourself truly whether you can make those terms differ much from the manner we now think decadently artificial on the canvasses of Guido Reni or of the Caracci. When I said all this to the friend who chanced to be with me, he waxed a little warm; for he was accustomed to reverence Milton, and thought me almost blasphemous.

Nothing could have been further from my purpose. What impressed me most was not that Milton thus showed how in life, like every wholesome man, he was himself a man of the days when he walked the earth. It was rather that the grave, austere earnestness of his mastered purpose surged so supremely strong. Amid his century of artifice and of cultured affectation, he was thus able, without disdaining contemporary terms, to make a supremely noble poem. In reverent admiration of its nobility one no more stops to remark its artifices than one stops to remember its origins.

If "Paradise Lost" were all that was left of his work, or indeed if all we possessed were only some colossal fragments of "Paradise Lost," Milton would still be Milton. It is not that the two other great works of his later years—"Paradise Regained" and "Samson Agonistes"—would not repay deep and loving study. It is rather that, when we are speeding on as we must speed now, they add, I think, no new feature to the austere and solitary individuality which we have been trying to define together. Puritan from the beginning Milton was, in the lofty seriousness of his purpose; Puritan he proved himself more surely still, in that passionate interval of his life when all his energies were given to the cause which he longed, with his fellow-Puritans, each in his own divergent way, to make dominant; Puritan most of all he seems in the sad and blind retirement of those later years when

the dominance of Puritanism was fatally past. History had surged beyond Puritan control; the only resource left Milton was to enshrine the spiritual meaning of his faith in his own austere, unwinsome, deathlessly noble terms. Thereby he enriched English literature with a kind of masterly poetry as unlike all others as were the man and the age which brought it forth.

When the great poems were made, to be sure, the age which truly inspired them was already a thing of the past. In strict chronology, they belong to the years when Pepys was writing his diary, and Butler's "Hudibras" was in the full freshness of its trivial popularity. The new literature of the Restoration was springing into its unlovely being, and other forces were at work which were finally to ripen into modern literature. Decadent beyond what had come before this new phase of English expression may well seem by itself. In truth, however, it was tending toward the approaching reintegration of national temper in its modern form. With all that, so far as we can touch on it at all, we must concern ourselves later. Now we can only glance at it, as it helps us to define the lofty surviving isolation of Milton.

For with Milton, as I have tried to make increasingly clear, this isolation was not only, and perhaps not chiefly, a matter of temperament or of choice. In Elizabethan days the national temper of England was an integral thing—with its spontaneity, its enthusiasm,

and its versatility. We have traced the disintegration of it, in various forms, during the years when Elizabethan England faded into the past, and when the tide of Puritanism rose, and when the passions of men, on every side, were stirred by fierce and futile efforts to make right control rights and to turn the course of history. It was during these days that Milton grew into his consciousness, and his increasing, deliberate mastery of his powers. His earliest poems, the precocious psalms of his boyhood, seem to have been written just about the time when King Charles came to the throne; and "Lycidas" was written toward the end of 1637. Those were the years when the drama was declining, when lyric poetry was specializing and weakening, when prose, despite its freedom, was tending to express no longer the temper of the nation but only isolated individuality. Then came the second stage of Milton's life, when he made his prose and his sonnets; when public duties, for a while, took him altogether from literature, and left him blind at last. This period embraces the next twenty years—from 1640, we may hastily say, till 1660. A mere glance at any tables which record the publications of those years will reveal the confusion which pervaded them.

We can sum up, in a way, the characteristics which mark all Elizabethan utterances as Elizabethan. So, turning to a later time, we can sum up, in some manner of intelligible phrase, the characteristics which

make the utterances of the eighteenth century distinct from those which came before or from those which have followed. But to sum up in any phrase which should generalize their individualities the men who published during these twenty years of Milton's busy activity would be little short of a miracle. Here are some of the names of them: Sir Thomas Browne, Denham, Fuller, Davenant, Jeremy Taylor, Francis Quarles, Waller, Crashaw, Vaughan, Herrick, Lovelace, Andrew Marvell, Richard Baxter, Hobbes, Izaak Walton, and Cowley.

Individual these men may well seem—more individual, at first glance, than the greater ones of the greater days which came before; but not, like those elder men, brethren. Nor yet were they quite brethren of their contemporary, Milton, whose very individuality and isolation, we can begin to see, was the characteristic which proves him most conclusively a true man of his time.

For the age of Shakspere, which was past, had been an integral age; and the age of Dryden, which was to come, was to be an integral age, too. In passing from one to the other, England was forced through a period of spiritual disintegration; and in this period there chanced to live the one English poet, since Shakspere, who is incontestably and forever among the lastingly great poets of literature. And this he could not have been unless he had been, in his earthly life, a man of the days through which it was his lot to

live. Nor could he have been a man of those swiftly changing days if the features of him, as we see him now, in the lengthening perspective of the centuries, were not individual above all things else—grave, lofty, austere, deliberate, noble, and blind.

To speak of him with any shade of comprehensiveness has been impossible. All I can hope is that these hasty words may have helped you to see him a little more clearly, in his historical relations, than you might have seen him without them.

XII

THE AGE OF DRYDEN

THE task left us is to sum up, as best we can, the literary history of England during the last forty years of the seventeenth century. These years began with the Restoration of King Charles II.; they included his inglorious reign and the expulsion of James II. from the throne; and they ended under the constitutional sovereignty of King William III. The very names of these sovereigns, repeated by rote as children learn them, tell the story of the change in English temper which had occurred since 1642, when the Civil Wars broke out. In the perspective of time this change seems the most critical in all English history. For the England of the elder days—the England before the Commonwealth—seems an old, strange England; and that which came after the Commonwealth seems, in little more than an old-fashioned way, the England which is England still.

It was during the earlier of the years at which we must now glance so quickly that Milton was making his great poems. They are the lasting and surviving expression of a period which was past when he wrote

them, a period which had finally vanished when the Restoration proved that the dreams of the Puritans could not control the course of history. As we remarked when we turned from these poems to glance at their environment, it was during the years which produced them that Pepys was writing his diary.

Pepys was born ten years before the Civil Wars broke out. When King Charles met his end, Pepys was only sixteen years old. When the diary begins, in the year 1660, he was not quite twenty-eight; and when he left off writing it, he was hardly thirty-seven. Somehow one is apt to think of him rather as an oldish man—which, indeed, he lived to be. But, in fact, these memoranda of which the deciphering has made him the most intimately familiar of all Englishmen, were jotted down almost from his youth and ended very early in his middle age. What they really record, with unique minuteness of fidelity, is the aspect in which daily life presented itself to an extraordinarily curious and busy young man who had grown to his maturity, such as it was, during the Commonwealth, and who had not the strength, even if he had been so inclined, to resist the influences about him during the first ten years of the Restoration. He had a remarkable power of perceiving whatever chanced to come uppermost in his consciousness,—whether this were a matter of fact, or an opinion, or merely some passing reflection,—and of jotting down his daily notes in terms which instantly convey his state of mind to the

minds of other people. Other people, to be sure, were never meant to read these records. There are moods in which, through all the endless entertainment they so surely afford, you feel some such twinges of self-respecting conscience as you feel when you do not resist temptation to overhear chattily confidential talk. But you catch so much of Pepys's own mood, the while, that you are not disposed to let the niceties of conscience hamper you. And so, with his help, you get, by and by, perhaps the most vivid impression of a past time which you can get from any book in the world. You feel almost as if you had actually lived through those seventeenth century years which Pepys has kept alive.

They were old-fashioned years, you feel,—quaint, both in their daily conduct and in their phrases. This quaintness, indeed, is what disposes us unthinkingly to fancy Pepys so much older a man than he actually was. But this very tendency indicates what in the end I cannot but feel the most significant aspect of the diary. The pages impress you like the garrulously confidential talk of some entertaining old person whom you have known. And the oldest persons you have known and listened to—though as a rule their memories have kept most vividly before them a state of life which faded before your own memory began,—are after all people who partly belong to the same world that you live in; they are not denizens of one historically different. To my mind, the

diary of Pepys is the first book in English which instantly produces the impression of proceeding, for all its oddities, from an older form of just the same society in which we are living—or at least of that in which our grandfathers lived. A few familiar names will perhaps make my meaning clearer. Defoe was born the year after the diary was begun; the novels which he made in the first quarter of the eighteenth century carry the impression forward. When Defoe died, Samuel Johnson was already of age. When Johnson died, Walter Scott was a boy of fourteen. Thackeray might have known Scott well. And it is hard for men of fifty at this moment to realize that Thackeray has even yet ceased to be quite contemporary. I have taken the names at random. There are numberless others which might have served our purpose as well; and all would tell the same story. From the time of Pepys to our own there has never been a radical change in the life of England as set forth by literature.

When Pepys was born, on the other hand, Shakspere had been dead less than twenty years; the first folio had been in existence less than ten, and Ben Jonson was still the living laureate. These very names, taken almost equally at random, indicate a national change, between 1632 and 1660, greater than is indicated by all the two centuries of the others put together. The elder world, during the last days of which Pepys saw the light, was to the end, in greater or less degree, spon-

taneous, enthusiastic, versatile. His own newer world, which has lasted almost to our own time, was none of these. When I seek a word to note the impression which it makes on me, in comparison, I can find none better than the neither very definite nor very happy word, tenacious.

Yet the characteristics of which the later world has been tenacious are not those which first appeared on its surface. Even in the earliest edition of Pepy's Diary, —and still more in those later ones which, with more regard for historical precision than for considerate discretion, have made public so many details of extremely private nature,—one cannot help feeling, year by year, the swift growth about the man, and sometimes in his own character, of what at first sight would seem an utterly decadent corruption. It is a commonplace that the fashion of England, repressed for half a generation by the impracticable austerities of Puritanism, reacted into an open licentiousness not quite paralleled before or afterward; it is a commonplace, too, that at the same time the moral saws of Puritan dominance did not quite die out. As one reads Pepys, these commonplaces spring into a life so vivid that one laughs at oneself for finding that here they seem—what just then they probably were—something like novelties. Here, in its heyday, is what to foreign eyes has ever since seemed the hypocrisy, the cant of modern England,—the virtuous phrasing, the far from virtuous conduct,—the characteristic which, at a moment of

sad international tension, Lowell satirized, across seas, in some of those lines from the "Biglow Papers" which, once read, stick in memory:

> Old Uncle S.,
> Sez he, I guess
> John preaches well, sez he;
> But sermon through,
> And come to do,
> Why, there's the old J. B.
> A-crowdin' you and me.

This Pepys went to church and listened to sermons as smugly and as honestly as any Puritan you please; he attended to his business admirably; he pried, innocently and without innocence, too, into the affairs of other people; he was insatiably curious about all manner of things, good and bad; and he misconducted himself with little more sense that what he did was not a matter of course than he felt in publicly presenting himself at divine service. To feel what this truly signifies concerning national character and temper, you must glance forward at the English literature of later times than those with which we are directly concerned —at the "Spectator," at "Tom Jones," and "Amelia," at the novels of Jane Austen, and at those of Thackeray. In the course of the generations, you will feel at last, the divergence between preaching and practice, which once seemed appalling hypocrisy, tended to pass into a phase where one can hardly name it by much more serious terms than sham or humbug. In which fact,

you may begin to perceive, I think, how to this day the real tenacity of England has been a tenacity of the one sound trait which revealed itself in that reckless time: this was common-sense, as distinguished from vague and untested ideals, however admirable they may appear.

But we stray from the matters immediately before us. Our real business is to glance at the new literature which came so quickly into being after the Restoration. To dwell on it in detail is not now in our power; and on the whole we need hardly regret the fact. Though beyond question this literature is historically important, a glance at any considerable body of it will suffice to show that it has little positive merit. Toward the end of Samuel Johnson's literary life was made that copious collection of British poets which his admirably characteristic introductory biographies have kept alive. For years the fifty-odd volumes in which they comprise the works of poets between Cowley and Gray have been favorite little books of mine; and of all their characteristics none has grown more salient than the number of writers whom Johnson's publishers thought worth preserving and who would otherwise be, for general readers, hardly so much as names. A number of these flourished during the years we now have in mind. In general they may be held representative of the lyric poetry which increased the mass of English literature between 1660 and 1700. Only two among them have retained any importance. Butler

has lasted to some degree; so, in far higher dignity, has Dryden. As for the rest, one need hardly remember them apart to-day. One need remember only that in their own time they were, or at least aspired to be, poets of fashion, as distinguished from anything more serious; that the fashion of their time was trivial and corrupt; and so that you find them to express little else than triviality or corruption.

As I write, a quatrain—from Rochester, I think,—springs to memory:

> Should some brave youth, worth being drunk, prove nice,
> And from the gay encounter faintly shrink,
> 'Twould please the ghost of my departed vice
> If, at my counsel, he repent and drink.

It rather innocently illustrates what I have in mind concerning this fashionable poetry. It shows, too, how the same fashion demanded a certain superficial amenity of manner—general lucidity of phrase, smoothness of flow, whatever should least strain the attentive power of readers. In brief, though the English politeness of those forty years was far from lofty, the whole character of this later seventeenth century poetry is rather polite than fervid or spontaneous. It tends straight toward the rigidly polite and cool conventions of the couplet, which dominated all the English poetry of the century then to ensue. It never seems broadly popular, never comprehensively national in the sense in which one felt so the elder and integral

literature of Elizabethan times. But neither does it seem individual, or solitary, as the disintegrant poetry seemed which followed toward the mid-century. Rather, the manner in which the individuality of writers is absorbed by the general type of their work suggests something analogous to the integrity of the earlier days. This new literary integrity, however, is not one of all-embracing national character; it is rather an integrity of a fashionable class apart.

The temper of this fashionable class certainly animates the most popular poem of the early Restoration, and perhaps the one work which could have proceeded from no other period,—Butler's "Hudibras." Pepys, who among his other merits was a frankly independent critic when he made his jottings for himself, thought ill of it. But the shrewdness of its occasional epigram and the imitable facility of its doggerel and of its astonishing rhymes have proved, in their own way, permanent. It was these, no doubt, which gave it instant popularity with all that sort of English folk who welcomed the downfall of dominant Puritanism; in all likelihood, however, they welcomed it still more because of its obviously extravagant satire. Satire, hitherto a rather minor form of English poetry, became and for a good while remained perhaps the most important. English satire has never been very fine; excellent satire, indeed, demands such national tempers as have made epigrammatic the idioms of Rome and of Paris; and in this Hudibrastic form English satire was more

crude than it was later. Of its sincerity, too, one cannot feel much more sure than one may generally feel in our own time concerning the sincerity of journalism. Throughout it, however, one can detect a trait really characteristic of such a society as welcomed and encouraged it. Sincere or not, satire is essentially a kind of writing which pretends to unmask pretence. The burlesque excesses of "Hudibras," of course, like the more formal invectives of other and later English satire, are preposterous. All the same, they must have seemed in their day refreshingly veracious as compared with canting parodies of virtue and decency. At that moment the recoil from impracticable Puritan ideals was extreme; and assertion of any ideals had come for the while to appear deliberately false.

We come dangerously near what is far from my real purpose—the appearance of casuistical defence. The licentious excesses of the Restoration were abominable; and the literature which recorded them remains so. At the same time, these excesses, both in life and in letters, are facts; and they are facts which marked a period not destined to be one of lasting national decline. In their obvious aspect, as commonplace has it, they were the surging reaction of the baser phrases of human nature which had been repressed, for too many years, by the futile dominance of the Puritans. There is another aspect of them, not exactly better, but at least less despicable, in which we may regard them rather as a cynical, but not for that reason a dis-

honest, expression of impatience with any form of morally pretentious untruth. If there be a better temper in them at all, if there be any sentiment for which we may still feel a gleam of respect, it may be expressed something like this: We have had enough of canting idealists, the fashionable temper of the Restoration seems to say; and we have experienced the oppressions and the anarchy into which their mendacious vagaries plunged us. Let us face facts as they are—ugly, riotous, perhaps gay, but surely wicked and abandoned. Facts are our nearest guides to truth, after all. Make of them what you will; it is better to recognize that whatever is is right than to pretend any longer that the only right things are things which never can exist in such a world as this of ours.

It is only, I think, when we take some such view of the matter as this that we can understand how, in Queen Anne's time, a personage at once so typical and so worthy as Sir Roger de Coverley could emerge from the later years of a society among the favorite amusements of whose youth had been the comedies of the Restoration. Mummified to-day in their stained quartos or their cracked leather bindings, or unwrapped in all the ugly nakedness of reprint, they are repellent things. There are traces of wit in them still, and of ingenuity; but there is no lingering trace of the poetry—of the lyric grace, of the old romantic spirit and beauty—which lingered even in the plays of Shirley. And, at least to modern readers, they are

not only more vile things than you can find elsewhere in accepted English literature, before or since; they are also, what in some moods seems worse, inexhaustibly tedious in their long-drawn-out monotony of effrontery. You cannot believe them, either, a bit more sincere, a bit more truly honest, than many of the satires seem which form so characteristic a phase of the lyric poetry contemporary with them. Yet, for all this you can hardly fail to detect in them two traits at once characteristic of their time and not unwholesome. They profess to set forth plain fact, as distinguished from all manner of moral pretence; and this they attempt to set forth in a style which approaches the language of daily life, as distinguished from the vagaries of the elder theatrical rhetoric. The fashionable public to which they appealed was one which had had enough of sham, of cant, of impracticable and misleading ideals in whatever form. What it demanded and welcomed was something which should seem, for the moment, shrewdly to assert a state of things approved by common-sense.

In this aspect, and I think in no other, the comedies of the Restoration show themselves to be something more than records of a passing but extreme reaction from the excesses of Puritanism—something more, too, than traces of the real decadence which had overtaken courtly fashion, no longer to be politically dominant in England. They prove also to contain premonitory traces of that prudent and tenacious recognition of the

value of facts, as distinguished from untested ideals, which, for two centuries after them, was to be so strong a feature of the English national character.

It was during the years, we have seen, when this literature of the Restoration was pursuing its mad career that Milton, in austere solitude, was making the great poems which record the spirit of the elder Puritanism. During the same years, old Izaak Walton, who had been born so long ago as the time when Marlowe was killed, was writing his later lives of Anglican worthies, which so gently record the sweeter temper of the past. And during these same years, too, there was growing to its ripeness a work which, a little later, gave a place in permanent literature to the spirit of devout dissent, still burning beneath the fashionable surface of life. One is sometimes disposed to feel, indeed, that—apart from the great poems of Milton—Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" is the one English work between the Restoration and the eighteenth century which has never lost its hold on human beings and which never can lose it. There is nothing else from those days which one would not spare sooner.

What gives it this diuturnity, to be sure, is hardly its substance, but rather the vividness of its narrative, the rugged force and humor of its characterization, and the wonderful felicity with which, in a dialect of its own, it adapts the English of the Bible to its homely service. These merits, all the while, are such as Bunyan would not much have valued. They are not of

the essence of his purpose; they are rather the accidental vanities which, in setting that purpose forth, he could in nowise avoid. A few years ago, in an elaborately classified American library, I chanced to look for the "Pilgrim's Progress" on the shelves appropriated to English literature. Finding no trace of it there, I was driven to search for it in the catalogue, where it presently appeared duly recorded under the heading of Dogmatic Theology. After the combined amusement and vexation which accompanied this discovery, I found myself rather disposed to think the classification defensible. Though far from indicating the whole character of the book, it comes fairly near indicating the actual intention of it. The allegory, the parable, was meant not to entertain, but actually to teach immortal truth;—to teach it, no doubt, in another guise than that assumed by creeds, but not in much other spirit.

And the truth which Bunyan thus sought to teach is the same truth which in a widely different way had inspired Milton to make his great poems; it is the same truth, too, which, during those very years, New England was attempting to embody not in literature, but in the structure of a society willing to accept its domination—the truth as the Puritans conceived it. In those days English Puritanism had passed beyond the stage where Puritanism still lingered in New England. In the mother country all hope that the Puritans might politically dominate had faded; and, as you ponder on

your memory of the "Pilgrim's Progress," you can feel this fact implicitly set forth there. The seeker for salvation no longer attempts to mould the world about him into another form than that which divine justice, or fate, or whatever you will, has imposed upon it. What he does attempt, wherever he finds himself, is only to tread for himself the true path. If thereby he can avoid destruction, he can show by example what other men should do. There was never a world so evil that good lives could not be lived in it. If godly men cannot dominate the vanities, they may at least persevere; and, after all, the most that the best of them may wisely hope for is that perseverance should spring up all about them. The more of us who seek salvation, the more may find it; and the highest ideal of all is that more and more shall seek it and shall find. Let each of us seek, then, if he will; humbly admitting that the dream of earthly dominance, so hopelessly disappointed a little while ago, was only another earthly vanity. Pagan, Pope, or Presbyter, it is all one; but the straight and narrow path still stretches before all who are willing devoutly to tread it.

Bunyan, very likely, would have been far from assent to such statement as this of his purpose,—a statement rather of the mood which results from reading his wonderful allegory than of any precise teaching you may find set down or intentionally implied in its pages. Yet this mood seems to me both one which naturally results from the reading and one which

goes far to place the pages in their historical setting. They were written in the world of which Pepys had so vividly recorded the first years; in the world from which Milton sadly sat apart, turning the inner eyes of his grave imagination back toward the fallen hopes of other days; in the world which had echoed with laughter over the lines of "Hudibras," and had welcomed with the noisy gaiety of its licentious fashion all the enormities of Restoration comedy. In every superficial or dominant aspect, it seemed a world more utterly fallen from spiritual grace than any which had come before. Yet, even in its ribaldries, as we saw a little while ago, we may discern, without attempting casuistically to defend them, something like a wholesome trait. At least, these roisterers, in their crude and coarse cynicism of spirit, disdained the falsehood of denying falsehood, the vice of cloaking vice. They had had enough of pretence that human nature and human life could be better things and graver than they knew them. They would rather face fact than disguise it,—face it carelessly, recklessly, contemptuously and contemptibly at once. At least they would not mouth loftily empty ideals, to which fact everywhere gave the lie.

Yet all the while ideals persisted, strong and unconquerable as ever. The difference, when you compare the Restoration with the generation before, seems to be that ideals no longer yielded to the vanity of dreaming that they could materially conquer. Conquest and

earthly power belong to sovereignty, and we are bidden render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's. We are not forbidden, at the same time, to provide ourselves with practical constitutional safeguards. Cæsar may not trespass on our rights; but neither may we trespass on Cæsar's. So long as he does not trespass, then, leave the world to him; and leave his responsibility to powers beyond the world. Let the world be evil as it may, let is rush headlong as it will to destruction. At worst we have, among our rights, the right to recognize, each for himself, ideal truth, and the right to strive for it each as best he may without trespass. No matter how base facts may be, ideals, so long as they be kept purely ideal, are facts, too; and facts all the more potent for their very disdain of material power. The centuries will show whether the true and lasting facts are those vile earthly ones which the shameless satirists and dramatists are setting forth in their nakedness, or those which nothing shall prevent earnest men from peacefully proclaiming in all their ethereality.

In some such mood as this, it seems to me, we may see the historical meaning not only of the allegory in which Bunyan enshrined the spirit of devout dissent, but the meaning as well of the sermons in which, during those years and during years then to come, good men persistently preached righteousness from the pulpits of the Established Church. No one could long pretend that King Charles II. was in any sense an edifying Defender of the Faith; and, for all the various

merits of his royal successors, few of these titular heads of the National Church have shown themselves precisely saintly. There have been periods meanwhile when spiritual grace has not been the most conspicuous feature of the Anglican clergy. But there has never been a moment when the Church, in the earnest belief of its earnest members, has not still been held historically the Church; nor yet a moment when an honest and earnest minister of that Church could not sincerely set forth, amid all the earthly sins and wickedness that may have surrounded him, the ideals of faith and of conduct which, however men or clergymen may have strayed from them, the Church has kept steadfastly in its custody. The Church, from the beginning of the Restoration, possessed the vitality which it has preserved; so did dissent. The earnestness of England has never really failed; and it has persisted, I am tempted to think, the more surely because it has never again tried to deny fact, and to make spiritual ideals materially dominant.

Vague and elusive as we may perhaps find the course of thought we are now attempting to follow together, we have come fairly near to generalizing several facts, at first sight distinct. First and greatest we touched on the isolated poems of Milton, revealing how grandly the spirit of the mid-century lingered for a while amid the baseness of the newer times. Our subsequent business has been with the literature peculiar to that new epoch. We glanced at the wonderfully unreserved rec-

ords of every-day reality which have been deciphered from the private manuscripts of Pepys; we glanced at "Hudibras;" we glanced at the fashionable poets, and at the writers of comedy, and finally we glanced at the "Pilgrim's progress." Taken together, these principal phases of Restoration literature do reveal, it seems to me, a common trait,—a trait which at once distinguishes them from all the literature of the earlier seventeenth century, and marks them as precursors of all the English literature for the century to come. And this trait I may call, perhaps, by no more solemn name than common-sense,—an impulse, more mature than that of elder times, to recognize and to respect plain fact, and to hold that ideals are things essentially apart, not to be ignored or neglected, but not to be confused with the inevitable circumstance of material existence.

There are one or two other aspects of English thought in these same years which may help us define this impression. Though not precisely within our range as students of literature, they may consequently deserve an instant of attention. When, a good while ago, we touched together on the works of Bacon, we dwelt a little on the fact that Elizabethan science was not in a state which could possibly warrant the magnificently comprehensive generalizations he attempted. In 1660,—the year when Pepys began his diary, the year when Charles II. was welcomed back to his throne by such poets of the elder time as Davenant and Cowley,

and by such poets of the newer days as Waller and Dryden,—there was laid what we may call the foundation-stone of the impregnable English science to come; in plainer words, the Royal Society was founded. Before the seventeenth century ended, the records of English science and philosophy already included, to go no further, the work of Boyle, of Newton, and of Locke. To dwell on this in detail is beyond our province. But the chief fact which these names imply seems surely, in another guise, the same fact which we have begun to discern elsewhere. The national temper of England was at last in a state where its most serious purpose was to ascertain indisputable truth, to plant its feet on solid ground. So when, disdaining temptation to the vagaries of untested generalization, English men of science vigorously devoted themselves to observation and experiment, they positively and permanently enriched human knowledge. In science the age was far more memorable than in literature; just as the age before had been far more memorable in literature than in science. This does not mean that imagination or fervor flagged; it means rather that, in obedience to the true spirit of their time, imagination and fervor were growing content to exert themselves within the limits of certainty.

Again, though the fact belongs to the later years of the forty over which we are now hurrying together, the Bank of England was founded before the century ended. It is not too much to say that between the

Restoration and the death of John Dryden, both the science and the finance of modern England came finally into existence. And Dryden, whose career extended throughout this period when England was at last proving itself modern, was the first eminent man of English letters whose work throughout seems a modern thing—something which belongs rather to our own time than to times gone before.

When I planned these lectures, accordingly, in the better proportions from which I have been forced to depart, I meant to give the last one wholly to him; for it seemed to me that a consideration of his writings would define and summarize, better than anything else, our impression of the later seventeenth century. He was about a year older than Pepys; so, like Pepys, he could remember the Civil Wars, and he grew up during the Commonwealth and the Protectorate. He published "Heroic Stanzas on the Death of Cromwell;" and a year later he published an ode of welcome to the restored King Charles II. He was among the earliest and most acceptable writers of Restoration comedy. His dramas and tragedies in heroic rhyme are the most copious and respectable examples of the passing fashion which attempted to replace the dead conventions of Elizabethan tragedy by something more like the splendid artificialities of classical tragedy in France. As a satirist he was at once the most robust and incisive of his day, and as little hampered by conscience as the weakest. At one time he was a member of the Church

of England, at another a Roman Catholic. His occasional verses—the only one which has surely survived is the ode to music, commonly called "Alexander's Feast" —show him, to the very end, a master of lyric method. His occasional prose, mostly in the form of copious prefaces and dedications, shows him at once a man of wide though careless reading in all ranges of literature —ancient and modern—and, whatever one may think of his opinions in detail, a vigorously sensible critic. Not only his satires, but his many translations and adaptations into contemporary terms of matters from foreign literatures and from the older English, went further than any other work of their time toward imposing on English verse the yoke of the couplet which it bore through a full century to come. His prose style has at last, in robustly pristine form, the cool lucidity and balance which, swiftly becoming more and more conventional, marked subsequent English style for more than a hundred years. Beginning with no particular eminence or advantages, he had made himself, long before the end, more dominant in English letters than any man had been before him, except Ben Jonson, or than any later man became except that other Johnson, who so strongly imposed his personality on literature during the later eighteenth century. And, in a way, one feels that the dominance of Dryden was perhaps the least disputed of the three.

Throughout, whether in his more careless moments or in his more earnest, his work seems that of a man

whose unquestionable power never so carried him away as to bewilder his shrewd recognition of contemporary fact, his fundamentally cool common-sense. He almost always wrote and often seems intentionally to have thought, in the fashion of the moment, leading it when he could, following it when he must. He was a Trimmer, more than once, if you like; but not for that reason contemptible, as trimmers seem at certain other times in history. Rather, the trimmers of his time seem, whether they quite knew it or not, people who were content to recognize fact which they could not control. The power which diverts historic force, they seem to have felt, knows better than any prating theorist in what direction historic force must move. It is wisest to admit this, once for all; to cheer on the winners and to let the devil take the hindmost. Such conduct, no doubt, is far from the ideal tenacity of uncompromising and irreconcilable devotees; you can never instinctively love it in such manner as that in which, when causes are finally and safely lost, you romantically love the passionate adherence of those who sacrificed themselves—the Jacobites, for example, or the Tories of the American Revolution. But the Trimmers of certain epochs have a tenacity of their own,—a tenacity not of ideals, which they deem follies, but of cool common-sense. And common-sense, though never stirring or at first flush inspiring, is in many aspects admirable.

Once more we may seem to be losing ourselves in

some labyrinth of casuistry. Nothing could be further from my purpose. Far as we have strayed from the landmarks of precise historic facts, we have always been students of literary history. .Our chief business together has not been critical, still less polemic; it has really been historical, but historical in a way which must often have seemed bafflingly indefinite. We have been attempting to trace the course of that vague yet undeniable thing, the temper of a nation, during a century when it underwent a marked and lasting change. In our effort to perceive and to understand this change, we have tried, again and again, to put ourselves for the moment into sympathy with one aspect of it or another; and except sympathetically, I have tried throughout neither to praise nor to blame, but only to set forth what seems to me to have been the truth.

So, in that hasty summary of Dryden's work, what I had chiefly in mind was no wish to condemn him or to defend him. It was only to present him in an aspect which should show, as clearly as possible, the manner in which his career exemplifies how the later, reintegrating literature of the seventeenth century came to lack the three characteristics which had marked the integral English literature of Elizabethan times. That earlier literature, we have often reminded ourselves, was spontaneous, enthusiastic, and versatile. Dryden never seems unthinkingly spontaneous; he is rather stoutly deliberate. He never seems enthusiastic; for all the boldness of his manner, he rather seems coolly

sensible. And although his work is far from monotonous, you can hardly feel him to have been precisely versatile; instead, the increasing assertiveness of his couplets and the growingly definite rhythm of his prose, at once vernacular and formally literary, indicate more and more adherence to soundly sensible convention. And as to the substance of his work, it seems serious only when we regard it as unmixed literature. Dryden was burdened with no deep sense of mission or of message. His dramas, tragedies and comedies alike, are not poems, they are only stage-plays, made for such audiences as the notes of Pepys give us a glimpse of before the curtain. His satires are full of historical interest; but they are hardly more profound or sincere than the diatribes of partisan journalism during the nineteenth century. His translations and adaptations are only restatements, in vigorously fluent vernacular terms, of matters which in their earlier forms were apt to have the grace of a far less sophisticated simplicity. His prose, which seems on the whole the best and most earnest of his work, is chiefly an admirably clear and spirited setting forth of increasingly cultivated good sense concerning literary matters. The thing you grow to like about him best is that with the years he ripened and sweetened.

The folio volume of "Fables," which he carelessly flung together in the last months of his life, to meet some technical contract with the publisher Tonson, is a pleasant book to take, now and again, from your

shelves. It is not only Dryden's last work; it is the final work as well of those forty years of English history whose beginning is so vividly recorded by Pepys. And as you turn the pages, whether of the preface which has lingered among the masterpieces of English criticism, or of the various poems which follow it, you can feel, for all the big carelessness of the compilation, that here, stronger and better than you would have dared dream, are all the virtues, all the merits which you could detect in the literature of the Restoration, with hardly any trace left of the baseness and the vileness which at first seemed bound to overwhelm them. Even amid the excesses we could perceive something like disdain for prating mendacity; it is better, the worst of these profligates seems to have thought, that we should admit and proclaim the full abomination of fact, than that we should cantingly preach ideals which give fact the lie. And in this mood we can detect the germ of one which in its maturity was to assume a form very different from the reckless and profligate cynicism of its first flush. For good sense, grown to the point of rationally recognizing the things which are admirable, and of quietly clinging to them as demonstrable certainties, may be no very edifying phase of human nature. At least, however, it is a sweet, and a sound, and a strong, and a safe one. And that is what one feels in the utterances of Dryden's later years. And that, I think, has been the underlying strength of England from Dryden's time to our own.

It would have been pleasant to dwell on this, as I meant to do at first. But our time grows very short. We can linger over Dryden no longer; and we can hardly glance at the one other aspect of his time on which I should most have liked to dwell also. By the terms of the foundation which has brought us together, we were compelled to devote ourselves to the consideration of some period in the literature of England. As I told you at the beginning, I chose the seventeenth century for two reasons. The first was that this century—the century of Shakspere, and of Milton, and of Dryden; the century which began with full Elizabethan integrity, which passed through the disintegration typified by dominant Puritanism, and which ended with a reintegration hardly yet crumbling—marks the greatest change in national temper which has yet declared itself in the history of England. The second reason came nearer to my heart; this same seventeenth century was that in which America parted from the mother country. So throughout I have tried to keep in view the fact, which seems to me, as an American, most significant of all,—the fact that, while England was undergoing her transformation into modernity, there was no similar change across the seas, where the elder temper had lingered on almost till the present day.

If time had served, I should have tried to illustrate this by comparing with the later writings of Dryden the one work of seventeenth century America which has any claim to permanence in English

literature, the "Magnalia" of Cotton Mather. Flung together almost as carelessly as Dryden's "Fables," and almost at the same time, this prose epic of emigrant Puritanism is as characteristic of King William's New England as Dryden's work is of the England where King William reigned in the flesh. And even now I cannot resist the impulse, as we hasten toward our farewell, of putting before you a single phrase, in which, during the years when Dryden's power was at its sweetest and ripest, Cotton Mather characterized the first minister of our New England Cambridge. Thomas Shepard was his name, an Emmanuel man, who put his name on the college books the year before the Pilgrims landed at Yankee Plymouth. And he made his way to America in time, and there died at last, full of years and of honors. And the sentence in which Cotton Mather keeps his memory alive is this—"In fine, the character of his daily conversation was a trembling walk with God."

Those words are almost literally contemporary, I believe, with "Alexander's Feast"; but they belong, in spirit, to the days before the dominance of English Puritanism was broken. Compare them with any stanza of Dryden's chief ode. The contrast tells the story of the parting of your country and of mine, two hundred years ago, and more.

From that day to this neither has quite understood the other. To such of us as love the inestimable traditions we must always cherish in common, there can

consequently come no more eager pleasure than that which arises from any effort to help our countries toward some better understanding in future. When I met you first, I tried to express in anticipation a pleasure of which the reality has proved even more deep than I should have dared expect. Your Cambridge has received me with a kindness so constant and so confident that I have long ago ceased to feel myself here away from home. Quite what this means, perhaps, none but an American can wholly understand. It means a welcome not only to your pleasant life of this century through which we are living together, but also to some personal share in those wonderful memories and traditions which will always make this English Cambridge a goal of pilgrimage for my countrymen. It means, for me, a new, wonderful, lasting sense of human fellowship with your worthies—on so many of whom we have hastily touched together. It means a debt which nothing can repay,—which I can only try thus simply to acknowledge. The best I can hope is that in time to come you may remember, as gently as you have welcomed, my effort to tell how that subtle, certain thing—the national temper of England, at a critical period in its history—presents itself to a mind moulded under influences purely American. If the memory lingers, even with a few, I shall have done the little in my power to strengthen the forces which now, so happily, are drawing our countries once more together.

INDEX

A

Bacon, Francis (1561–1626), 175, 183
Bank of England, 346
Baxter, Richard (1615–1691), 203, 265
Beaumont, Francis (1584–1616), and Fletcher, John (1579–1625), 77–84
Bible, 169–175, 216
Browne, Sir Thomas (1605–1682), 198–202
Browne, William, of Tavistock (1591–1643?), 129, 134, 149
Bunyan, John (1628–1688), 339–343
Burton, Robert (1577–1640), 192–197
Butler, Samuel (1612–1680), 323, 335–337

C

Calvinism, 217–224
Campion, Thomas (d. 1619), 102, 146
Carew, Thomas (1598?–1639?), 137–139, 153
Cavaliers, or Royalists, 248–250
Chapman, George (1559?–1634), 58–62
Character-writing, 166–168
Cowley, Abraham (1618–1667), 145, 345
Crashaw, Richard (1613–1649), 142, 264

D

Daniel, Samuel (1562–1619), 104
Davenant, Sir William (1606–1668), 145, 345
Davies, Sir John (1569–1626), 106
Dekker, Thomas (1570?–1641?), 69–71, 75
Denham, Sir John (1615–1669), 146
Donne, John (1573–1631), 119–127, 164
Drama, Elizabethan, 29–44; later, 46–100
Drayton, Michael (1563–1631), 104
Drummond, William, of Hawthornden (1585–1649), 62, 66, 110, 111, 119
Dryden, John (1631–1700), 7, 8, 146, 346–353

E

Euphuism, see Lily
Evolution of literature, 30, 47–50, 57, 85, 94, 128, 145

F

Falkland, Lucius Cary, Lord (1610?–1643), 136
Fletcher, Giles (1588?–1623), 129–134
Fletcher, John, see Beaumont
Fletcher, Phineas (1582–1650), 133, 134
Ford, John (fl. 1639), 93–95, 137
Foxe, John (1516–1587), 14–16, 214
Fuller, Thomas (1608–1661), 166, 167, 202

G

Gardiner, Samuel Rawson, 176, 210
Gosse, Edmund, 146
Gosson, Stephen (1554–1624), 20, 98
Greene, Robert (1560?–1592), 34–37
Greville, Fulke, Lord Brooke (1554–1628), 122

H

Habington, William (1605–1654), 136, 140
Hall, Joseph (1574–1656), 106, 166, 167
Harvey, William (1578–1657), 202
Herbert of Cherbury, Edward, Lord (1583–1648), 119, 122, 264
Herbert, George (1593–1633), 142, 166, 167, 264
Herrick, Robert (1591–1674), 146–153
Heywood, Thomas (d. 1650?), 69, 71–73
Hobbes, Thomas (1588–1679), 203
Hooker, Richard (1554?–1600), 14, 160
Hutchinson, John (1615–1654), 264

J

Jonson, Ben. (1573?–1637), 50, 62–68, 90, 110–120, 147, 163

K

Kyd, Thomas (1557?–1595?), 34, 35, 37, 90, 93

L

Learning, English, 192, 197, 198, 271, 346
Lee, Sidney, 34, 40, 55
Lily, John (1554?–1606), 16–20, 32, 34–36, 161, 177
Literature, defined, 2, 155
Literature in America, 7
Little Gidding, 16, 264
Locke, John (1632–1704), 346
Lovelace, Richard (1618–1658), 140
Lyrics, Elizabethan, 13, 44; later, 47, 101–154

M

Marlowe, Christopher (1564–1593), 33–37, 50, 52, 61, 84, 91, 93
Marston, John (1575?–1634), 57, 75, 93, 106

Masques, 282–285
Massinger, Philip (1583–1640), 93, 96, 210
Mather, Cotton (1663–1728), 354
Mather, Increase (1639–1723), 253
Middleton, Thomas (1570?–1627), 67, 75–77, 87, 96
Milton, John (1608–1674), 7, 8, 134, 145, 153, 267–327

N

Napier, John (1550–1617), 202
National Temper, in general, 4; divergence of, 8; Elizabethan, 43–45, 156; disintegrating, 101, 153, 159, 262; reintegrating, 346
New England, 174, 212, 217, 221, 227, 234–236, 238, 259, 261, 293, 354
Newton, Sir Isaac (1642–1727), 346

P

Pamphlets, controversial, 263, 304
Pastoral poetry, 288–293, 299–301
Peele, George (1558?–1597?), 34, 35, 37
Pepys, Samuel (1633–1703), 323, 328–333
Plan of this book, 9
Prose, Elizabethan, 14–16; later, 155–206
Prynne, William (1600–1669), 98, 240, 284
Puritanism, 16, 17, 109, 207–266

Q

Quarles, Francis (1592–1644), 265

R

Ralegh, Sir Walter (1552?–1618), 26, 111, 184–192, 215
Restoration, comedy of, 82, 323, 337–339, 347; poetry of, 333–334; preachers of, 343–344
Right and Rights, 5, 231–233, 242, 244, 245, 250, 254, 257, 260, 343
Rowley, Samuel (d. 1633?), and William (1585–1642), 75
Royal Society, 346

S

Satire, 63, 65, 106, 123, 134, 166, 335, 347, 351
Schelling, Professor Felix, 135
Shakspere, William (1564–1616), 7, 8, 30, 33, 35–44, 51–57, 61, 64, 76, 83, 88–90, 93, 95, 98, 163, 182
Shirley, James (1596–1666), 78, 97–99, 240
Sidney, Sir Philip (1554–1586), 17, 20–26, 31, 98
Sonnets, 24, 40, 41, 104, 297, 311–313.
Southwell, Robert (1561?–1595), 105
Spenser, Edmund (1552?–1599), 25–29, 104, 107–112, 132, 135, 150–153, 288–290.
Spenserian poets, 128–135, 142
Suckling, Sir John (1609–1642), 139
Sylvester, Joshua (1563–1618), translator of Du Bartas, 275, 317

T

Taylor, Jeremy (1613–1667), 203
Thorndike, Professor A. H., 56, 83

Tottels' Miscellany, 10, 12
Tourneur, Cyril (1575?–1626), 85
Translation, 33, 65, 94, 160, 170, 351
Tribe of Ben, 136–142, 146
Tyndale, William (d. 1536), 172

V

Vaughan, Henry (1622–1695), 142
Virgil in mediæval legend, 179, 182

W

Waller, Edmund (1606–1687), 136, 146, 345
Walton, Izaak (1593–1683), 120, 203, 265, 339
Webster, John (1580?–1625?), 51, 52, 85–93
Wither, George (1588–1667), 131, 133, 134, 265

Date Due

1-10-62			
NOV 26 1969			

Library Bureau Cat. no. 1137

PR
437
.W469

45786
Wendell, Barrett
The temper of the 17th century in English literature.

DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED
11-12-69	van der Horst	
11-26	Renew	✓ 1L